

Ohio House Finance Committee

Written Testimony

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Dear Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the proposed changes to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and its impact on affordable housing initiatives across the state.

Introduction

My name is Amy Albery, and I serve as CEO of Wallick Communities. Founded in 1966 by Jack Wallick, we are approaching our 60th year in business and have grown into one of Ohio's leading affordable housing providers, with more than 200 communities across the Midwest. Our homes span rural, suburban and urban markets. Across them all, we share one goal: to ensure that every resident has access to a safe, stable and affordable place to live.

Impact of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund

Ohio is facing a growing housing crisis, and I commend the House for its past support of policies and funding aimed at expanding access to affordable housing. As an organization working directly in affordable housing development and preservation, we have seen firsthand how critical the Ohio Housing Trust Fund is in bridging funding gaps and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently. Similar to the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which thrives under a structured, statewide approach, the Trust Fund ensures consistency and effectiveness in tackling Ohio's housing needs.

By consolidating resources at the state level, the Trust Fund enables a strategic, data-driven approach to housing investment. This ensures funds are allocated based on statewide priorities, rather than the fragmented, localized decisions that can arise at the county level, which may not align with broader housing needs and goals.

At Wallick, we rely on this stability and clarity. We are often planning projects years in advance. Redirecting funding decisions to 88 separate counties introduces fragmentation and uncertainty, which can be at odds with the steady, disciplined planning affordable housing demands.

Risks to Underserved and Rural Communities

This change could also create an uneven playing field for our rural Ohio communities. Larger counties may have the capacity to take on housing planning independently, but smaller, rural counties often face limited resources. Without the centralized support of the Trust Fund, they risk losing access to essential funding altogether. These communities already struggle with fewer development partners and limited tax revenue. Losing the statewide coordination that the Trust Fund provides could exacerbate these challenges and hinder long-term housing solutions in these areas.

Over the years, Wallick has developed and preserved housing in many rural Ohio counties thanks to the strategic use of state resources. In some cases, it's been the only way to make a project viable. Removing that support would have long-term, compounding effects.

A Call for Preservation and Partnership

We understand the desire to bring decision-making closer to home, but the Ohio Housing Trust Fund has long demonstrated that centralized coordination doesn't mean a one-size-fits-all approach. On the contrary, it has funded diverse housing solutions tailored to local needs. This proposed change introduces significant uncertainty, particularly for long-standing projects.

The Ohio Constitution affirms the state's role in leading development initiatives that benefit public welfare, and we believe maintaining a centralized housing trust is crucial to fulfilling that responsibility. While well-intended, the proposal could create gaps in support, especially for rural communities dependent on state-managed funds for affordable housing.

In consideration of Wallick and our many community partners and collaborators, I urge you to protect the Ohio Housing Trust Fund's current structure and oppose this

provision in HB96 to ensure we can continue building, preserving and protecting homes for those in need.

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund has helped fund the rehabilitation and new construction of thousands of affordable housing units in the state of Ohio in recent years and is a vital resource for the State's affordable housing production. The Trust Fund serves as not only a funding mechanism, but a partnership between the state, developers, service providers and the communities we serve. It allows organizations like Wallick to do this work with confidence, knowing we are backed by a system that values strategic investment and stability.

Thank you for your past leadership and continued attention to housing in Ohio.