



January 20, 2021

Dear Councilmember Favor and members of the Housing Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of the proposed housing legislative package. I agree that access to affordable housing is one of the most important and pressing issues facing our community, and substantial reforms are needed to help residents seek housing. The changes of Source of Income, Renter's Choice, and Rental Receipt will make it more affordable and accessible for the residents of Columbus to find stable housing. I also add some suggestions for additional improvements and possible collaboration between our offices on this important work.

Adding Source of Income (SOI) to protected classes reduces housing discrimination

Eliminating discrimination based on Source of Income (SOI) is necessary to secure the right of all citizens to equal housing opportunities. Any resident who receives outside assistance to pay rent should have fair and equal access to rental housing.

The addition of SOI to the list of protected classes for fair housing has been adopted locally and across the state. Seven localities in Ohio, including Bexley in Franklin County, have implemented similar ordinances prohibiting discrimination in housing based on source of income. With SOI protection, Columbus would become the largest city in Central Ohio to add protections for renters using housing vouchers and other forms of rental assistance.

Renter's Choice reduces upfront costs, making the initial cost to move more affordable

For many residents, the cost of a security deposit is a major financial barrier to access housing. Renter's Choice reduces the upfront price of renting a property by offering alternative payment methods that mitigate the requirement of a one-time lumpsum payment. In doing so, more residents will be able to afford to rent housing units that they would otherwise be priced out if it were not for Renter's Choice. Since Columbus residents consist mostly of renters, offering alternative payment methods for a security deposit will dramatically improve housing accessibility in the city by making the upfront cost most feasible and affordable.

Rental Receipts increase transparency and provide greater housing security

Specifically, the Rental Receipt is a needed improvement for establishing a record for rent payments. Greater transparency with rental properties increases housing security for tenants. Establishing a record system provides greater clarity for tenants, can reduce confusion by tenants, and limit the chance for intimidation by landlords in case of payment disputes.

Under Ohio law, counties with populations greater than 200,000 residents (including Franklin County) are required to maintain a rental registry of all rental units in the county. In many cases, tenants call the Auditor's office for contact information related to their landlord. With a Rental Receipt, this issue will be resolved because tenants will have both evidence of payment and the contact information of their landlord, creating an effective communication channel and paper trail. I fully support the inclusion of a rental receipt requirement as it



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reinforces the rental registry maintained by the county auditor. Together, the rental registry and a rental receipt provide transparency and record keeping for rental properties.

Municipal Rental Registry Requirements and Foreclosure Processes

I also wish to highlight one area for possible further action or joint advocacy between our offices. The Auditor's county rental registry is an important tool, but enforcement and effectiveness are limited by the state law structure and lack of county home rule flexibility. In other parts of the state including Summit County and much of Cuyahoga County there are strong municipal rental registries. These coordinate with the county level provision and provide additional oversight through zoning and code enforcement. In Summit County, information must be up to date in order to proceed with an eviction. Enhancing these options locally would give additional tools to track the use and availability of housing to address access concerns both in real time and in long-term planning.

Conclusion

Increasing accessibility to quality affordable housing is critical to creating strong neighborhoods and a thriving community. The legislation represents a significant step to increasing access and transparency for quality, affordable housing for all. I urge the committee and council to adopt the housing legislative package.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss the legislation today, and I would be happy to discuss this matter further. Never hesitate to reach me directly at AuditorStinziano@franklincountyohio.gov or 614-525-5700.

Sincerely,



Michael Stinziano
Franklin County Auditor