



**Monday, March 6, 2017**

## **National Report On Affordable Housing Highlights Trust Fund Needs**

Advocates say increased funding to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund would go a long way in light of a new national report examining the housing shortage in Ohio and other states.

The OHTF allocated more than \$710 million in Fiscal Year 2016 to address crucial housing needs for seniors, veterans, and others - a need advocates say is clearly demonstrated by a recent report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition that examines the current climate in Ohio and beyond.

"These are long-term problems, but I think we can make steady progress in addressing them if we invest some resources in them," Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio Executive Director Bill Faith said in an interview. "We need to substantially increase the level of the funding that the Trust Fund receives."

**The NLIHC report**, called "The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes," uses local-level Census data to annually examine the lack of affordable housing across the country compared with the number of extremely low income renters.

Overall, Ohio has 43 affordable housing units for every 100 extremely low income households, which include those with incomes at or below 30% of their area median income or the poverty level. That means Ohio has 269,383 too few affordable units for those households, the study concludes.

Of Ohio's three largest metro areas:

- The Columbus area had 53,311 too few affordable units to adequately serve extremely low income renters - down from 55,675 too few units last year.
- Cincinnati had 48,224 too few units - up from 47,486 too few units last year.
- Cleveland had 51,661 too few units - down from 55,579 too few units last year.

Ohio's overall numbers are an improvement from last year, when there were 274,346 too few units.

(See **Gongwer Ohio Report, April 11, 2016**) But nationally the housing shortage has worsened. There were 7.4 million too few units available in this year's report compared to the 7.2 million found in the 2016 analysis.

"This year's analysis continues to show that the poorest households in our nation face the largest shortage of affordable and available rental housing and have more severe housing cost burdens than any other group," lead author Andrew Aurand said. "The shortage disappears for households higher up the income ladder."

Advocates say a renewed investment in OHTF could help alleviate that shortfall. Appropriations for the trust fund decreased nearly 21% between Fiscal Years 2013-2017.

In its recent economic impact study, released Friday, the Ohio Housing Finance Agency determined the OHTF generated \$589 million in economic activity per year - or \$11.56 for every \$1 spent by the state.

"In short, not only do Trust Fund programs help tens of thousands of Ohioans find housing stability every year, but they also attract large amounts of outside dollars and produce dramatic positive effects on the state's economy," according to the **OHFA report**.

Earlier this year, COHHIO and hundreds of other organizations representing business interests, housing and community development sectors called on state leaders to boost funding by \$15 million a year in the upcoming budget. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, January 18, 2017**)

Mr. Faith said the current budget proposal (**HB 49**) would allocate \$53 million to the program annually. But in recent years the allocation has fallen well short of that due to a lack of available funds, Mr. Faith said. The annual funding, he said, averages out to about \$43 million.

COHHIO has spent the last year working to educate lawmakers on the issue and Mr. Faith said the effort appears to be paying off. He said the group is increasingly seeing lawmakers on both sides of the aisles and in both chambers recognize the fund's merits.

He said several lawmakers are exploring potential solutions, none of which are ready to be unveiled.

"A number of members have suggested they would be sympathetic to an increase in this area and they've seen the good things that it's doing out in their districts and would like to see more of that done," he said. Compared to previous General Assemblies, "There's much broader support."

The trick, he said, will be finding the money.

"It's a hard budget; everybody says that but it's true," he said. "There's not a lot of extra money lying around so we're probably going to have to look at more creative solutions than what we've tried to do in the past."

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