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COHHIO To Continue Pushing For Housing Trust Fund Boost

Stakeholders have begun to regroup after their efforts to secure new funding for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund fizzled during the waning hours of the budget process.

A coalition led by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio has long lobbied for more state support for the fund, which expands housing services and opportunities for low-income Ohioans. After inching closer to that goal during the recent budget cycle, the groups are now back to square one.

"The coalition has just started discussing the next step in our effort to strengthen the Ohio Housing Trust Fund," COHHIO spokesman Marcus Roth said.

Hundreds of organizations representing housing, community development and business sectors joined in January to call for a \$15 million per year increase in funding for the OHTF. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, January 18, 2017**)

Although no additional funding was ultimately granted in the recent budget (**HB 49**), Mr. Roth said the group is encouraged by lawmakers' renewed attention to the issue.

"The Home Matters to Ohio campaign got strong support from leaders in both parties and both chambers, who now recognize that housing has a major impact on many other public policy issues facing the state, like health care, child welfare and the opioid epidemic," he said. "The problems of homelessness and affordable housing are now on the legislative agenda, which is where they belong given the fact that rents continue to increase while wages stagnate."

Advocates initially seemed poised for success after the House earlier this year inserted language removing a \$50 million cap on deposits into the trust fund. The chamber also sought to eliminate the Housing Trust Reserve Fund, which would have enabled all fees collected by county recorders to be deposited instead into the trust fund itself. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, April 25, 2017**)

But faced with continually underperforming state tax revenue, the Senate eliminated that language in changes that were ultimately upheld by the subsequent conference committee. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, June 27, 2017**)

Meanwhile, the gap between renters' wages and housing costs continues to widen. Mr. Roth said the typical Ohio renter earned \$12.87 an hour in 2016 - about \$2.13 less than needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

A 2017 report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition and COHHIO estimated a worker would have to make \$15 an hour to afford modest rental housing. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, June 8, 2017**)

"We've seen the gap between rents and wages grow steadily over the years," Mr. Roth said. "The Housing Trust Fund helps make housing more affordable for the most vulnerable Ohioans, but the need vastly outpaces available funding.

"So we will continue advocating for a solution that bolsters the Trust Fund to advance the state's efforts to fight homelessness and expand the supply of housing that is affordable to low-income Ohioans," he added.

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