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Groups Join Forces To Fight Homelessness, Seek Additional Trust Fund Money

Hundreds of organizations representing business interests, housing, and community development sectors and others are calling on state leaders to boost funding to fight homelessness.

Home Matters to Ohio is calling for a \$15 million per year increase in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund in the upcoming biennium budget.

"As an investor in affordable housing in the markets we serve, we've seen that the Ohio Housing Trust Fund is often a critical piece of the puzzle that forms these development deals," Michael Taylor, senior vice president and west territory manager for community development banking at PNC Bank, said in a release.

"PNC supports Home Matters to Ohio because we know that a stronger Trust Fund means more affordable housing, which means stronger families and a stronger economy for all of us in Ohio."

In the 25 years of the trust fund's existence, nearly \$800 million has been distributed to local programs that help to fight homelessness and home insecurity, which allowed the state to leverage even more through federal and private sources of funding, the coalition said. It has also resulted in \$589 million a year in economic activity.

However, appropriations for the trust fund decreased nearly 21% from Fiscal Year 2013 to Fiscal Year 2017, the coalition **reported**.

Despite a 20% drop in homelessness in the past five years, more than half of the 1.5 million renters in Ohio spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing, a figure that places a family in the "housing insecure" category.

"Fifth Third Bank recognizes that safe, decent, affordable housing is a fundamental building block for healthy families, and we've seen how the Ohio Housing Trust Fund helps make home a reality for thousands of vulnerable Ohioans," said Stefanie Steward-Young, senior vice president of community and economic development at Fifth Third Bank. "At the same time, each dollar the trust fund invests in

housing development leverages an additional \$8 in private and federal matching funds for Ohio's economy."

The coalition also said that research has shown that safe and affordable homes can help improve health care, education, child welfare, the economy and public safety.

"Housing is an essential foundation for health and well-being, and a critical element of the social determinants of health," said Thomas Strauss, CEO of the Sisters of Charity Health System. "In our own health system within our health care services, it is far too common to witness how homelessness and housing insecurity have been linked to serious chronic conditions. The trust fund can help our patients and those we serve find housing and, as a result, help our interventions become more effective and enduring."

The trust fund also supports aging Ohioans through repair and accessibility programs that allow them to remain in their homes.

"Area agencies on aging use trust fund dollars to make seniors' homes safe and accessible so they can age in place. Our local home repair efforts can save the state money by keeping seniors in their own homes and out of costly nursing facilities," said Larke Recchie, CEO of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging. "The Ohio Housing Trust Fund helps make home a reality for Ohio seniors who are struggling to get by on a fixed income."

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