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-- Contacts listed at the end of the release --

**Advocates: Housing Discrimination Bill is
“Same Pig, New Lipstick.”**

Proponent hearing on SB 134 scheduled for today in the Senate Civil Justice Committee

A recycled bill by Sen. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) would legally immunize small landlords who discriminate and would increase costs born by tenants and landlords in housing discrimination complaints, said advocates for fair housing, legal aid and disability rights groups today. “This bill is the same pig with new lipstick,” said Jim McCarthy, president of the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center, referring to Sen. Seitz’ failed SB 349. “It reverses civil rights protections and increases costs to landlords and tenants. It’s a bad deal for Ohio.”

SB 134 follows the ill-fated SB 349, introduced by Sen. Seitz last year then quickly silenced after HUD determined the bill’s passage would throw Ohio out of whack with federal law. When Ohio loses its “substantial equivalence” to federal law, it also loses more than \$1 million in federal funds to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC) for investigation and enforcement of discrimination cases. In addition, it forces both landlords and tenants into more expensive and complex federal channels to process discrimination complaints. HUD recently weighed in on SB 134 and again found “substantial equivalence” problem.

“Because SB 134 proposes exemptions that are broader than those provided in the Act, wrote Joseph A. Pelletier, HUD’s director of Fair Housing Assistance program, “SB 134, if enacted, would jeopardize the substantial equivalence of Ohio’s fair housing law.” (HUD letter attached.)

SB 134 “does the opposite of what it says it intends to do,” said Jim McCarthy of the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center. “It absolutely will increase costs for respondents, despite what Sen. Seitz may have intended.”

SB 134 also lowers and caps damages that landlords found guilty of discrimination would have to pay. “When we lower the standards of discrimination, we chip away at civil rights and at a law that has effectively served the people of Ohio for more than 50 years,” McCarthy said.

“The civil right to equal opportunities in housing in Ohio remains under attack,” said Hilary King, Executive Director of the Housing Research & Advocacy Center. “The majority of people in Ohio live in one, two and three family homes. They would lose fair housing protections against housing discrimination under this bill.”

"SB 134 would actually make discrimination by some smaller landlords legal in Ohio," said Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio. "All forms of discrimination by any Ohio landlord should remain against the law."

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