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**Housing Advocates Rail Against Amendment that would
Cut Housing Trust Fund in Half**

COLUMBUS – The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) reacted with disbelief over a Senate amendment in the state budget bill that would strip half of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund proceeds, return them to counties, and create 88 county bureaucracies to fund housing.

“It is a terrible idea to have certain government offices unfamiliar with housing administration suddenly begin allocating housing dollars,” said Bill Faith, COHHIO executive director.

The amendment requires that the county auditor, county recorder and county commissioner or their delegates determine by majority vote how the funds are to be used.

“They’re creating 88 county bureaucracies where county auditors and recorders have little or no knowledge or experience administering housing programs,” he said. “These bureaucracies will require huge administrative costs to get up and running. At a time of very scarce resources, this would dismantle – for no good reason -- an effective policy that has been serving critical housing needs across Ohio for nearly 25 years.”

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund was created in 1991, after voters approved a constitutional amendment making housing a public purpose. During the 2004-2005 biennium budget session, the legislature established a permanent, dedicated funding source through the Housing Trust Fee that is collected by the county recorders. Currently, the Trust Fund is capped at \$50 million annually, but has averaged less than that over the past few years.

The Trust Fund supports a range of projects and programs to help address homelessness and support the development of quality affordable housing options around the state. It leverages federal and private resources in public/private partnerships as much as 9 to 1 to help stretch state dollars to meet the housing needs of our military veterans, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and working families.

The Trust Fund is administered by the Development Service Agency, which has decades of experience of administering both federal and state housing resources. Allocations are

based on recommendations of a 14-member advisory committee representing various sectors of the housing and lending industries and local governments.

“The advisory committee has a cumulative knowledge about statewide need,” Faith explained. “It’s like with highway projects; if you know the needs of the entire state, you make priorities this year and allow other projects to go forward next year. County officials would not have that vantage point.

“This rogue amendment is bad public policy and should be removed from the state budget. It’s an ill-conceived notion that would create housing dysfunction across the board,” he said. “Our most vulnerable populations would be hurt the most, and that’s the exact opposite of what the citizens of Ohio voted for 25 years ago.”