



Affordable Living

Safe, Comfortable
Community Living

Senate Bill 36 Opponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Ways and Means Committee
April 2, 2019

Chairman Terhar, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, my name is Kathy Ison-Lind and I am the Vice President of Affordable Living for Episcopal Retirement Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this very important bill that could have a significant negative impact on our residents. Episcopal Retirement Services is an Ohio-based provider of services to seniors serving a range of resident incomes in various settings including our two continuing care retirement communities, in the community through community based services, but much more so to the many we serve who have very limited incomes. In Ohio, we provide housing with substantial services and support to over 1600 low-income seniors living in our 26 communities, eight of these communities do not have rent subsidy. (I have included a map of our Ohio properties for your review). We are very grateful for the support of each district's representative for these communities and each resident that benefits because of its existence. Not one of these properties could have been built nor can be sustained without the support of this public/private sponsorship.

Seniors are in need of housing that is decent, safe and affordable. Our waiting lists vary, but some are as long as two years. We are already seeing the waits get longer as more seniors become age eligible and can no longer afford their current home expenses or may not be able to keep up with the burdening maintenance issues. In our non-subsidized communities, those without a HUD housing assistance program, project based voucher or rural development assistance, we charge our residents rent that is below the HUD market rent. Nevertheless,





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oftentimes this reduced rent is still a burden on our residents with some paying over 50% of their monthly income in rent. The average income of our residents is about \$15,500 per year in our low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC), non-subsidized properties. Because we need to know the annual incomes of our applying residents to see if they qualify in meeting the income restrictions, we are aware that some may not be able to pay the rent. Communities with rent subsidy have long wait lists and a resident with low income may not be eligible for years. In these instances, we may give the applicant a rent concession in one of our non-subsidized communities while guiding them in applying for a housing choice voucher or remaining on the wait list for one of the subsidized communities. How can we give a rent concession?

LIHTC properties have very tight budgets with little cash flow. In order for us to give this rent concession, we look to our not-for-profit parent company for philanthropic support. We raise over \$200,000 per year through our Good Samaritan Mission drives to support our low-income elders living in our communities in Ohio. In addition to rent assistance, we provide many other services that the rent income cannot support. We always provide service coordination for each senior. Social workers assess our residents to determine what supports and services will help them age in place in their new community that they now call home. They then set up arrangements for doctors visits, transportation, meals on wheels, homemakers, etc. They also help the seniors to socialize and get acclimated to their new home.

We provide many activities that provide fun, purpose and stimulation similar to those you will find in one of our CCRCs. In addition to paid staff, we recruit volunteers from area churches that “adopt” our residents and become companions.





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We provide bus transportation weekly to the grocery store and a department store. This allows residents access to healthy food and goods they need. We also take them out for fun outings. This also helps with socialization, a necessary component of a happy and healthful life. We have been able to get busses through grants, but the driver's salary, bus gas and maintenance is paid for through the Good Samaritan Mission fund.

Exercise is a vital component of staying healthy and happier as we age. ERS strives to have an exercise center at each of our communities and has developed programs to encourage and reward residents for regular exercise. We also design the centers for rehabilitation after a hospital stay so that residents can come back home and exercise with their home health physical therapist, rather than have a costly Medicare nursing home stay. Home, in their own apartment, is where our residents want to be if possible. Moreover, it is the most cost effective choice. We have equipped most communities through donations or grants. Our wellness coordinator's salary is funded through a very generous donor who has seen firsthand the incredible impact of these initiatives.

We have collaborated with local home health agencies who provide a nurse, free of charge to our residents one day per week to monitor vital signs such as blood pressure, glucose levels for diabetes and answer health questions of our residents. These nurses have been instrumental in helping our residents who are ready to call the life squad realize a call to the doctor is all that is needed. For other residents, they get them to immediate help avoiding a more serious problem if they had waited. This same nurse will work with the hospital discharge planner to get the resident back home with home health services rather than a stay in a MEDICAID nursing home. The cost savings is at least 10:1. Because of the collaborative services of our social workers and





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our home health partner, at this moment, we have five residents in hospice care in their own home where they want to be. This is way beyond safe and sanitary housing. This is because we use any cash flow, all our raised philanthropy dollars and some of our developer fee to help support services for our residents to help them age in place until death, whenever feasible.

At ERS, we believe that every senior we serve, whether in one of our Continuing Care Retirement communities or our low-income community, deserves to live in a beautiful, well-kept apartment with competent and helpful staff members that assist the senior to age and thrive in place. If this bill passes and we have to pay increased real estate taxes, all of our fund raising dollars will have to go toward paying these taxes and not the life enriching services we provide to each low income senior. In reality, we will not be able to raise the amount of money through philanthropy these increased taxes will require, as donors will not find this a compelling reason to give. We will have to make choices about availability of maintenance and housing managers and keep housekeeping and grounds care to a minimum. We will not be able to continue to provide the level of service nor keep our buildings and grounds up to minimum standards. We may also need to decide if we can continue to grow and serve more seniors.

I appreciate the opportunity to share our mission and the impact we have on the lives of those we serve. I would be happy to answer any follow-up questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Kathy Ison-Lind, VP Affordable Living and In-Home Services