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Contact: Lisa Cuschleg
(614) 224 - 4422

Urban Homestead Zones Could Help Break Cycle of Urban Decline, The Buckeye Institute Says

Columbus—A groundbreaking program proposed by the Ohio House of Representatives could fundamentally change the future of Ohio’s urban centers, an analyst for The Buckeye Institute said today.

“The proposed program strikes at the heart of what makes big cities so difficult to revitalize,” said Samuel R. Staley, Ph.D., a senior fellow at The Buckeye Institute and nationally recognized expert on urban development and policy. “Public safety and good schools are essential for any city to grow. Urban Homestead Zones would give Ohio’s cities new tools to address these issues in a constructive, proactive way.”

Urban Homestead Zones, or UHZs, were introduced today in the “Report of the Subcommittee on Growth and Land Use” after more than 18 months of testimony from leading local, state, and national experts, including those from The Buckeye Institute.

Under the proposal, city councils and commissions in Ohio’s eight largest urban centers could designate blighted neighborhoods as Urban Homestead Zones. Families and individuals investing in new or rehabilitated homes in a UHZ would be eligible for a full school voucher. School vouchers would give these pioneers a full range of private and public educational choices, offsetting what is often considered the single largest roadblock to attracting and retaining families: low quality schools. In addition, the UHZ would have its own private police force paid through local property taxes.

In 2003, The Buckeye Institute released *Education Empowerment Zones: Revitalizing Ohio’s Cities Through School Choice*, a peer reviewed policy study that analyzed the potential impact of expanded school choice programs on Ohio’s urban centers and public schools. The study concluded that citywide



voucher programs could reverse population losses, significantly increase property values, and stabilize tax revenues for Ohio's largest cities.

In Cleveland, expanding the school voucher program to all city residents could:

- Add nearly 10,000 working and middle-class families into the city;
- Promote racial and economic integration;
- Increase the median income by 50 percent;
- Improve proficiency test scores in Cleveland's public schools by 21 percent through the competitive effects of school choice

Similar impacts were estimated for Dayton, Akron, Cincinnati, and Columbus, and the results are available on The Buckeye Institute's web site, www.buckeyeinstitute.org.

The Buckeye Institute is an independent, nonprofit research and education organization, or think tank, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. Founded in 1994, the Institute has been researching, analyzing, and providing commentary on school choice and education reforms since its inception. In 1999, The Buckeye Institute launched its Quality Growth Initiative, focusing on market-oriented approaches to land use, growth management, urban revitalization, and transportation problems.

Samuel R. Staley, Ph.D. is a senior fellow at The Buckeye Institute as well as the Los Angeles-based Reason Foundation. His articles on urban development and growth have appeared in several leading professional publications, including the Journal of the American Planning Association, Planning magazine, Urban Land, the Los Angeles Times, and the Wall Street Journal. His most recent book, co-edited with Florida State University economist Randall G. Holcombe, is Smarter Growth: Market-Based Strategies for Land-Use Planning in the 21st Century (Greenwood Press, 2001), and was called the "most thorough challenge yet to regional land-use plans" by Planning magazine.