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Local Rental Registry Won't Increase Affordable Housing

Testimony on Proposed City Rental Registry
Columbus City Council

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As Submitted

Thank you, Councilman Bankston and members of the Columbus City Council for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the proposed rental registry ordinance.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am a senior research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

The proposed ordinance will be more harmful than beneficial. It will raise housing costs for Columbus renters, particularly those least able to afford them, without delivering meaningful benefits that cannot already be achieved.

The goal of improving housing conditions and safety is laudable and understandable, but the proposed rental registry’s design is flawed and expensive. It mandates annual registration fees, inspections, and administrative burdens that will increase rent prices and negatively affect renters downstream.

Research by housing economists and housing industry groups has quantified how **regulations and compliance costs raise rents**. Studies show that increased operational and regulatory expenses, including additional inspections and fees, are statistically associated with higher rent levels because landlords, facing higher compliance costs, adjust their pricing. This is especially true for smaller multifamily properties and lower-income households. In markets like Columbus, where housing supply is relatively inelastic in the short and medium term due to **supply constraints** on affordable housing, landlords are more likely to pass regulatory costs through to tenants rather than absorb them over time.

The proposed ordinance should be considered in conjunction with overall living costs in the United States. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau **data**, median gross rent, which includes rent and utility expenses, increased 2.7 percent between 2023 and 2024—reaching \$1,487 per month. And **national utility data** show that households spend a median of approximately \$4,168 annually on basic utilities such as electricity, gas, water, and sewer. These are, of course, expenses renters must pay in addition to their base rent.

Significantly, Ohio already has a state-mandated rental registration requirement. Under **Ohio Revised Code Section 5323.02**, owners of residential rental properties in counties with populations greater than 200,000, which includes Franklin County, are required to register their rental properties with the county auditor and provide critical details, including: the name, address, and telephone number of the owner and, if a business, critical relevant contacts who own the residential rental property. This current registration requirement provides a baseline of transparency and contact information without redundant city fees and bureaucracy.

Rather than creating a costly new municipal registry that duplicates state requirements and adds additional compliance layers, the Columbus City Council should strengthen enforcement of the existing state-mandated county registration system and ask the General Assembly to increase penalties for noncompliance. A higher, more consistent penalty for failing to register at the county

level would provide an effective deterrent. Importantly, it would not target honest property owners and would not risk needlessly raising rents for lower-income residents.

Although the intent behind the proposed rental registry is commendable, the economic evidence and cost trends indicate that the proposal risks making living in Columbus less affordable, hurting low-income residents more than it helps them. State laws addressing the concern can be strategically modified to remedy lingering noncompliance issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this important issue.



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