



Franklin County Board of Commissioners
House Bill 20 – Written Proponent Testimony
House Civil Justice Committee
March 23, 2021

Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski, and Members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 20.

Stable housing has long been recognized as one of the social determinants of health, which are, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the conditions in which people live that affect individual health outcomes, risk factors, longevity and quality of life. Throughout the course of the pandemic, stable housing has taken on an additional level of urgent importance in protecting individual health and mitigating community spread by limiting instances where housing instability forces families to double up with family or friends or seek congregate emergency shelter.

The initial federal pandemic response, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), included a 120-day moratorium on residential evictions. While the CARES Act moratorium was allowed to lapse, the CDC Director took the unprecedented step on Sept. 4, 2020 of issuing an Order once again halting residential evictions. The Order has since been extended twice, most recently through March 31, 2021. Although the national vaccination effort is underway, there is no evidence to suggest that conditions will have improved to the point that the Order can be permitted to lapse March 31 without significant public health ramifications. The uncertainty around the term of the CDC Order, and whether or how long it will be extended, may compel county governments to devote already limited time and resources for contingency planning that could be better be deployed toward tactics and strategies to mitigate the community spread and protect public health.

House Bill 20 would place a moratorium on eviction and foreclosure actions for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency and require any eviction and foreclosure actions filed within 60 days after the emergency declaration expires to be referred to mediation. Instituting this moratorium will allow state and local entities like Franklin County to implement a wide array of rental assistance programs – many utilizing federal dollars – as a means of addressing ongoing areas of need and concern related to our residents' current and long-term wellbeing.

Coupled with these federally-funded rental assistance programs, House Bill 20's moratorium can prevent vulnerable adults and families from going into arrears and allow landlords to remain current on mortgages or other related financial obligations in the midst the associated economic downturn.

We ask for your favorable consideration of House Bill 20.