

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – April 26, 2016

The Housing Trust Fund: Know its Value

Karen Rainey, LWVO Housing Specialist

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund, a primary funding source for low and moderate income housing and homeless programs, survived last year's budgeting process but continues to need our support for the valuable resources it provides to communities across the state. The creation of the trust fund back in 1991 and securing a dedicated funding stream in 2003 were both supported by LWV Ohio.

There is a legislative cap of \$50 million per year that can be allocated for housing programs through the trust fund; previously, any of the dedicated revenue received above that amount went into the state's General Revenue Fund. In the past several years, revenues have been erratic - ranging from a low of \$39.6 million to a high of \$73 million a year. The governor's budget last year (**House Bill 64**) included a statutory change to help stabilize funding by creating a Housing Trust Reserve Fund. If the amount of revenue received during a year exceeds \$50 million, any additional revenue up to \$15 million will be deposited in the reserve fund. Once the reserve fund reaches \$15 million, any additional revenue will go to the state's General Revenue Fund. The reserve fund will be available for use when revenue falls short of \$50 million, and allow critically important programs to continue even in years when revenue declines.

Nevertheless, housing needs continue to outstrip funding. There is still a need to raise the \$50 million cap on the trust fund. We need to build awareness of the value of the trust fund to support expansion efforts in the next budget cycle. We need to insure that our elected representatives know that each trust fund dollar leverages more than \$6 in private and federal matching funds and generates nearly \$15 in overall economic activity.

The Housing Trust Fund supports a range of housing needs, including emergency shelter, construction, rehab and repair, handicapped accessibility modifications, rental assistance and down payment assistance and financial counseling for formerly homeless families. You can see how your county has benefited from the trust fund by going to www.development.ohio.gov/cs/cs_hf and looking at Beneficiaries by County. Just click on your county on the state map for a listing of organizations, programs and dollar amounts. Most of these programs could not exist without trust fund dollars.

The Housing Trust Fund is administered by the Ohio Development Services Agency (formerly the Ohio Department of Development), Office of Community Development. Funds are allocated based on recommendations by a 14-member advisory committee, and are targeted toward helping low-income Ohioans.

The Message: Housing needs are still critical and the numbers of homeless persons are growing. Be an advocate for housing - get to know what's happening in your community and how the trust fund improves living conditions for Ohio's more vulnerable residents.