



OLBCF: BLACK PAPERS

Policy Brief

Theme: Affordable Housing

Bill/Policy: “Provide Grants for Mortgage, Property Tax, and Utility Bill Help”, Senate Bill (SB) 255

Status: Referred to Finance Committee

Date: March 2026 | **Lead:** Yassah Tommy

THE QUICK CLIP

Senate Bill (SB) 255 restores the Save the Dream Ohio Program and the Save the Dream Ohio Utility Plus Program to help eligible homeowners avoid foreclosure and prevent utility shutoffs. The bill directs the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) to use \$10 million to provide grants for overdue mortgage and utility payments for homeowners who earn \$75,000 or less and who are either age 65 or older, have a disability, or are caregivers for someone with a disability. Eligible households could receive up to \$3,000 per year in assistance. In plain terms: SB 255 is designed to stabilize housing for Ohioans most vulnerable to cost shocks—so one missed payment does not turn into displacement.

THE STATE HOUSE BREAKDOWN

- **Current Status:** [Referred to the Finance Committee on 10/1/2025](#)
- **Before SB 255:** Following COVID-era economic hardship, Ohio used federal American Rescue Plan funding to operate the original Save the Dream Ohio program, which provided mortgage and utility assistance to eligible households. ¹ As of September 30, 2025, the program reported \$280.8 million in total funding, \$261.3 million disbursed to households (about 93.06% of total funding), and 35,212 households assisted, with 50,119 applications submitted.² This program's history matters because it shows Ohioans will use stabilization programs at scale when they are accessible and well-administered—especially when costs rise faster than incomes.³
- **After SB 255 (What the bill would do):** SB 255 restores these programs with a narrower eligibility focus and a smaller annual benefit. The bill directs OHFA to distribute \$10 million in grants to homeowners earning \$75,000 or less who are either 65 or older, disabled, or caregivers for someone with a disability.⁴ Eligible households could receive up to \$3,000 per year to help with overdue mortgage payments and utility bills.⁵
- **The "Why":** Sponsors Sen. Hearcel F. Craig (D) and Sen. Michele Reynolds (R) cites rising housing costs—especially property taxes, insurance, and utility bills—and emphasize that seniors, disabled Ohioans, and caregivers are particularly vulnerable because many are on fixed incomes or face additional costs that strain household stability.⁶ They describe SB 255 as temporary, targeted relief intended to help homeowners stay housed while broader solutions to housing affordability and property tax reform are considered.⁷

THE IMPACT ON OHIOANS

How this could affect our families, friends, and communities

- **Economic & Social Stakes:** Ohio’s housing pressure is already severe. OHFA reports that more than 1.2 million Ohioans (11%) live in households spending at least half their income on housing—an indicator of severe cost burden that increases the risk of missed payments and housing loss.⁸ Evictions have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with 104,844 eviction filings in 2024 (6.5% of renters), and the eviction filing rate was highest in Central Ohio (8.5% of renters).⁹ Homelessness is also rising: on a single night in January 2024, 11,759 Ohioans were counted as experiencing homelessness—the highest point-in-time count in a decade.¹⁰ SB 255 targets groups more likely to be harmed by these cost shocks—older adults, Ohioans with disabilities, and caregivers—by offering short-term assistance to prevent utility shutoffs and mortgage delinquency from turning into displacement.¹¹
- **The Disparity:** Housing instability in Ohio has a clear racial pattern—especially in homeownership, housing cost burden, and housing wealth. OHFA reports that Black householders are far less likely to own their homes than white householders (37% compared to 73%).¹² Census data shows a similar gap (approximately 35% Black homeownership compared to 72% white), reinforcing the scale of the disparity.¹³ Even where Black homeownership is rising, Black Ohioans still hold a disproportionately small share of the state’s housing wealth: while 13.6% of occupied housing units in Ohio have a Black head of household, only 6.2% of total home values in the state are held by Black homeowners.¹⁴

The burden of severe housing cost pressure is also heavier for Black Ohioans. OHFA reports 20% of Black Ohioans live in households spending at least half their income on housing, including over 68,000 people in severely mortgage-burdened households and nearly 275,000 living in severely rent-burdened housing.¹⁵ Black mortgage holders are almost twice as likely as white mortgage holders to be severely cost-burdened (15% compared to 8%).¹⁶ Black renters are also more likely than white renters to be severely rent-burdened (32% compared to 23%), increasing risk of eviction and homelessness.¹⁷ Because SB 255 narrows eligibility, OLBCF’s equity question is straightforward: will eligible Black elders, disabled Black homeowners, and Black caregivers be reached at the scale of need—and quickly enough to prevent housing loss?¹⁸

- **Real World Impact:** Consider a 65-year-old homeowner living on a fixed income who faces a sudden medical bill. One missed utility payment can trigger late fees, shutoff notices, and emergency costs that spiral. Or consider a disabled homeowner or caregiver who loses hours at work or experiences an unexpected expense and falls behind on a mortgage payment. SB 255 can provide short-term relief to help eligible households catch up and stay housed—but speed matters, because the gap between “behind on bills” and “housing loss” can be short.¹⁹

The scale of need is clear from Ohio’s recent experience with housing stabilization programs. As of September 30, 2025, the original Save the Dream Ohio program reported \$280.8 million in total funding, \$261.3 million disbursed to households (about 93.06% of total funding), and 35,212 households assisted, with 50,119 applications submitted.²⁰ That track record shows Ohioans will use these programs when they are accessible and well-administered—especially during periods of rising costs. SB 255’s narrower eligibility and lower annual cap make clear public reporting and outreach essential to ensure the program reaches those most at risk and prevents avoidable displacement.²¹

ANALYSIS & REFLECTION

Housing stability is a wealth issue—and Ohio’s homeownership gap makes Black households more exposed to crisis. In Ohio, Black householders have a homeownership rate of about 35%, compared with about 72% for white householders.²² Ohio is also experiencing severe cost burden, eviction pressure, and rising homelessness—making prevention policies urgent.²³

SB 255 restores a proven stabilization tool—but the policy tradeoff is targeting versus scale and sufficiency. SB 255 allocates \$10 million and provides up to \$3,000 per year for eligible households (seniors, people with disabilities, and caregivers earning \$75,000 or less).²⁴ Sponsors describe the bill as temporary relief while broader housing affordability and property tax reforms are considered.²⁵ The original Save the Dream Ohio program operated at meaningful statewide scale (35,212 households assisted and \$261.3 million disbursed to households as of September 30, 2025).²⁶

- **Nonpartisan Accountability Recommendation:** SB 255 should be evaluated by outcomes—not intent. At a minimum, Ohio should publicly report application volume, approvals/denials and denial reasons, time-to-disbursement, county/region distribution, and stabilization outcomes (prevented foreclosures and prevented utility shutoffs) to assess whether the program is reaching households with the highest housing instability risk, including eligible Black households.²⁷

DIRECT ACTION: THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

How to move from reacting to leading.

- **Immediate Action:** Track SB 255 and sign up for updates through the Ohio Legislature website so you know when hearings and votes are scheduled.
- **Community Action:** Share this brief with neighbors, senior groups, disability advocates, housing counselors, faith communities, and community organizations so eligible households know support may be available and can prepare early.
- **Deep Dive:** Watch committee hearings on [The Ohio Channel](#) and consider submitting written or in-person testimony to the Senate Finance Committee. OLBCF can help community members prepare testimony.

OLBCF | Black Papers: A Public Policy Brief

Nonpartisan 501(c)(3) Research & Education

References

¹ Ohio Housing Finance Agency, “Save the Dream Ohio Program Update,” *Ohio Housing Finance Agency Blog*, January 31, 2023, <https://ohiohome.org/news/blog/january-2023/savethedream.aspx>; Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, *Assistance Available for Ohio Homeowners Impacted by COVID-19* (press release, August 15, 2022), <https://www.aaa5ohio.org/resources/press-releases/assistance-available-for-ohio-homeowners-impacted-by-covid-19-1/>

² Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*. Available from: https://analytics.das.ohio.gov/t/OHFAPUB/views/PublicSDODashboard_26Q1/Summary?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y

³ Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*.

⁴ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*. Available from: https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/api/v2/general_assembly_136/legislation/sb255/00_IN

-
- ⁵ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*.
- ⁶ Craig, Hearcel F., and Michele Reynolds. Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 255, “Save the Dream Ohio Act.” Ohio Senate Finance Committee, 136th General Assembly, October 21, 2025.
<https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/sb255/committee>
- ⁷ Craig, Hearcel F., and Michele Reynolds. Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 255, “Save the Dream Ohio Act.”
- ⁸ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*. Available from:
<https://ohiohome.org/research/documents/FY26-HNA-ExecutiveSummary.pdf>
- ⁹ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*
- ¹⁰ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*
- ¹¹ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*; Craig, Hearcel F., and Michele Reynolds. Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 255, “Save the Dream Ohio Act.”
- ¹² Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ¹³ U.S. Census Bureau. *TENURE BY RACE OF HOUSEHOLDER*. 2020: Decennial Census, *DEC Demographic and Housing Characteristics File* (Table H10). Retrieved from
<https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALDHC2020.H10>
- ¹⁴ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ¹⁵ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ¹⁶ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ¹⁷ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ¹⁸ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*.
- ¹⁹ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*; Craig, Hearcel F., and Michele Reynolds. Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 255, “Save the Dream Ohio Act
- ²⁰ Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*.
- ²¹ Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*; Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*
- ²² U.S. Census Bureau. *TENURE BY RACE OF HOUSEHOLDER*. 2020: Decennial Census
- ²³ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.
- ²⁴ Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*
- ²⁵ Craig, Hearcel F., and Michele Reynolds. Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 255, “Save the Dream Ohio Act
- ²⁶ Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*.
- ²⁷ Ohio Housing Finance Agency. *FY 2026 Ohio Housing Needs Assessment – Executive Summary*.; Ohio Department of Administrative Services. *Public SDO Dashboard – Summary (26Q1)*; Ohio General Assembly. *Senate Bill 255 (136th General Assembly)*.