***NEWS RELEASE***

**New Report Proves Benefits of Housing, Calls for Action to Address Central Ohio Costs**

Opportunity to improve the local economy, health and education

Columbus, OHIO – (October 24, 2023) – Central Ohio could lead the nation in equitable and sustainable community growth if housing costs are reduced during this time of great economic expansion in the region. The result would be more dollars for local economies, better health for residents and a stronger education system. In short, every individual in the region would benefit, no matter their socioeconomic status. But action must be taken.

That is the primary message delivered in a new report by the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio (AHACO). The report – “Finding Home in the Heart of it All” – contrasts the region’s job growth and dramatic economic expansion with mounting affordable housing needs. See the full report at [www.ahaco.org/findinghome](http://www.ahaco.org/findinghome).

**Assessing & Projecting Housing Gaps**

The report updates and expands 2017 research which previously found that 54,000 Franklin County households were severely cost burdened, paying more than half their income towards housing. That extreme burden forces families to choose between the mortgage or rent and other necessities, like food and medical care.

Today, that number has dropped to some 52,000 households. This 4% reduction was possible despite unprecedented housing pressures caused by the pandemic, the global economic slowdown, and continued population growth because of a concerted effort by Columbus and Franklin County leaders to tame housing costs. It stands in contrast to other growing communities whose costs continue to climb.

However, only assessing one county fails to tell a complete story. This new research finds that 80,000 households in the 15-county central Ohio region now face this severe housing cost burden. Moreover, local housing costs are increasing at the fastest pace in the region’s history. In fact, area home prices are growing three times faster than the median household income. This is not only a challenge for people with lower earnings; the fastest-growing segment of individuals who are over-extended on housing costs is among those earning up to $74,999 a year, oftentimes professionals struggling to make ends meet.

Today’s report further projects that another 20,000 central Ohio families will become cost burdened by 2040 if swift action is not taken. In other words, by the time today’s first graders are graduating college, a population the size of Newark, Ohio, will have slipped into housing instability.

Beyond merely projecting risk, the landmark findings in the report are that all major quality-of-life attributes – particularly health, education and economic well-being – will improve if measures are taken to curb housing costs.

**What If We Cut the Housing Gap in Half?**

AHACO’s report repeatedly asks one simple question: “What if we cut the housing-cost burden in half?” It appears this is the first time that a local community has ever calculated the secondary benefits of addressing its housing needs. Researchers found that the benefits spanned the three primary indicators associated with material and physical security: education, health and economic prosperity. Some examples of the report’s findings are:

**Regarding education**, cutting the housing gap in half would allow 3,000 more third graders to achieve third grade reading proficiency and an additional 600 students would graduate high school – key indicators for lifelong success. By providing students with a stable, safe place to study and avoid disruptive moves, five school districts in the region would increase their Ohio School Report Card letter grades.

**Regarding health**, cutting the housing gap in half would enable a quarter of residents to increase their life expectancy by more than five years. By channeling income that is currently consumed by unaffordable housing to other necessities, over 5,000 families would gain food security and over 2,500 older adults would avoid rationing their medications.

**Regarding the economy**, cutting the housing gap in half would add 25,000 more households to the middle class, create 40,000 jobs each year throughout the region and lift at least 5,500 children out of poverty.

**How to Unlock this Potential**

The report highlights that cutting central Ohio’s housing gap in half is a feasible objective. It notes that cities across the country are already building at a much greater rate than our region. Austin, Texas, for instance, has a population that is nearly identical to Columbus but it builds over 40,000 residential homes per year, nearly 4 times the rate of greater Columbus.

Although the academic report is policy-neutral and does not prescribe a specific strategy for closing the housing gap, the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio simultaneously released an Action Supplement that highlights proven strategies that the region can build upon to close this gap. That call to action recommends that central Ohio:

* Build housing that is affordable to central Ohio's workers and their families.
* Expand homeownership and tools to help current owners stay in their homes.
* Grow income mobility programs and supportive services to stabilize low-income neighbors.
* Support policymakers as they address our region’s mounting housing needs first.

“Central Ohio stands at a pivotal crossroads,” said Bob Bitzenhofer, AHACO Board Chair and Vice President for Planning and Development at Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. “The region is facing a sizable affordable housing challenge – one that resonates throughout our society. Prioritizing affordable housing cannot only ease the burden on Ohio’s residents, but also unlock substantial community progress. This is a call to action.”

**Local Leaders Speak Out**

Many central Ohio leaders are calling for action in support of increasing affordable housing.

**City of Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther** said, "Affordable housing isn't just a roof over our heads; it's the cornerstone of a thriving community. Through the Columbus Housing Strategy, our region is collaborating to double the number of units built over the next 15 years while simultaneously funding affordable housing that will support households that make less than $50,000 a year. The Columbus Housing Strategy will ensure that attainable housing is a right, not a privilege, as we grow as a region that welcomes all and leaves none behind.”

**Columbus City Councilmember Emmanuel Remy** said, “Elected officials in every Central Ohio community need to get behind creating more housing. We are in a unique position to improve the quality of lives of people who are not only marginalized by their race, income, gender, sexual orientation or where they live, but those who want a better life and are simply priced out of the housing market by no fault of their own.”

**AT&T Ohio President Molly Kocour Boyle** said, “Having a place to call home is a fundamental human right. It’s vital to our economy and quality of life. Every business leader I know realizes that employees are happier and perform better when they have a stable income that lets them live the American dream – buying a house. AT&T and central Ohio are making great strides to bring digital connectivity to every family, but reliable internet-for-all can’t be a reality until we have decent housing for all. So, it’s incumbent upon us to work together for the benefit of everyone by addressing the cost of housing.”

**Nick Jones, VP of Community Wellness at Nationwide Children’s Hospital**, said, “Improving access to quality affordable housing is a big community-wide issue that requires community-wide solutions. Public and private partnership is critical to addressing the systemic issue. Investing in affordable housing is investing in the health and well-being of the children in our community who are the future of central Ohio.”

Nationwide Children’s Hospital believes that health care must extend beyond the hospital to the places where children live, learn and play. Safe and stable housing directly affects a child’s health and the likelihood of maintaining health into adulthood. The hospital has been committed to improving access to affordable housing for 15 years through its Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families initiative, impacting more than 730 homes.

**Cara Jeffers, teacher with Canal Winchester Local Schools**, said, “Student performance, behavioral issues and social skills go hand in hand with stable housing. It’s been documented, and I have seen firsthand, that students who move frequently fall behind other students in just about every category. When children have the security provided by a good home, they are more likely to have better report cards, achieve more in extracurricular activities and go on to lead productive lives. For the sake of our students, central Ohio cannot afford for the affordable housing gap to widen.”

**AHACO Board Chair Bob Bitzenhofer** said, “The focus lies on the value of action rather than the cost of inaction. Ultimately, the solution lies in the creation of well-designed policies, projects and programs that prioritize stable housing solutions.”

**AHACO Executive Director Carlie J. Boos** said, “This report shows us the path to a future that we all deeply desire, one where our kids thrive. It’s incumbent on all of us to get in the game to bring that future to life. Attend a zoning hearing, speak at a public hearing, share your housing story with elected officials. Together, we can make this a reality.”

**About AHACO**

The Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring Central Ohio communities have the resources, tools and support they need to solve our housing challenges. We draw knowledge and expertise from our 29 members who work across the affordable housing spectrum. They include philanthropic organizations, advocates, shelter operators, builders, investors, services providers, housing counselors and property owners. AHACO provides data and research, community education, technical assistance, facilitation, planning and advocation to meet the area’s housing needs.

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