



State Representative Hearcel F. Craig

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Rep. Craig, Recorder O'Connor tackle fair housing language with proposed law change *Bill would allow removal of discriminatory language from property documents*

COLUMBUS— State Rep. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus) and Franklin County Recorder Danny O'Connor today announced new legislation to give property owners the freedom to redact discriminatory language from their online housing documents.

The proposed law change follows O'Connor's discoveries of racially discriminating language, or restrictive covenants, expressed in thousands of property documents that historically barred African Americans, Jews and others from owning a home in some neighborhoods.

"Even though this type of discrimination is not enforceable, I want to make it clear that in Ohio, and certainly in Franklin County, we do not condone offensive or discriminatory language of any kind," said O'Connor.

Housing discrimination referenced in these property documents has been unlawful and unenforceable since a 1948 Supreme Court ruling and the enactment of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. However, under current Ohio law, county recorders do not hold the authority to edit documents once they have been recorded, regardless of the content.

"As a military veteran and state representative, I believe that protecting our country's fundamental values of freedom and equality are vital to ensuring a high quality of life for everyone," said Craig. "This language undermines our strides, advancement and progress as a community and nation. Redacting it is a small, but simple step we can take to further thoughtful dialogue within our communities, while showing would-be residents and businesses that we are not stuck in shadows of our past."

The proposed legislation would specifically allow property owners, attorneys, title companies and other agents authorized to do business in Ohio to notify their recorder's office of a potential restrictive covenant, as well as give the recorder permission to redact a restrictive covenant from an online version of the property document. The original document will still be held for historical purposes.

"This is not an attempt to mask or hide from our past mistakes. It is imperative we preserve our history so that we can learn from such blunders and remember how far we have come," added O'Connor. "I believe this piece of legislation strikes a balance between preserving our past and still being able to be mindful and respectful of those who are affected by such language."

The legislation comes amidst increased public discourse about how to remember parts of our nation's history that have been overshadowed by discrimination, hate and racism.

"I believe there is a way to balance remembering the darkest moments in our country without allowing relics of discrimination and injustice to eclipse the progress we have made by working together," Craig added.

The proposed House bill will be assigned to a House Standing Committee, where it will wait to receive a first hearing.