



## Core cities strategy needed to reverse Ohio population trends, mayors say



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COLUMBUS — Increased investment in Toledo and Ohio’s other core cities is necessary to change the state’s downward population trajectory, according to the bipartisan Ohio Mayors Alliance.

Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz said the organization’s four-point [plan](#) will help grow the Glass City and other municipalities across the state.

“Fundamentally, what this proposal does is it would allow cities to use the resources necessary to grow,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz said. “In Toledo’s case — as is the case in most of the rest of Ohio — that is building more housing.”

The mayor said studies have shown that people want to live in Toledo, but they can’t move into the city because of the lack of housing.

“It’s great that we know that, but the real challenge is that building housing is so expensive,” he said. “In an environment where the state legislature

over 20 years has made massive, crippling cuts to cities across Ohio — even when you manage tax dollars well ... you get to a point where the dam is going to break.”

The mayors’ plan would set aside a portion of the proposed Ohio Core Cities Transformation Fund to pay for infill housing in cities facing vacancy and disinvestment.

“Instead of focusing on the past and focusing on the pain that has been done, we came ... with a bipartisan solution that can provide the resources to help address this problem without raising a tax or redirecting any funding,” Mr. Kapszukiewicz said.

Toledo’s mayor joined several other mayors in Columbus for a news conference announcing the proposal on Sept. 3.

Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb said Ohio has lost a congressional district in every decade since 1960.

“That means less influence in Washington, D.C. in terms of investments in infrastructure and investments in our social safety net,” Mr. Bibb said.

“That influence matters when it comes to the issues facing not just urban communities across the state but rural communities as well.”

Springfield Mayor Rob Rue said Ohio’s economy is more balanced than other states due to its numerous cities and metro regions.

“This is a unique advantage that makes Ohio more regionally balanced, less dependent on a single urban hub, and better positioned for economic growth across the state,” Mr. Rue said.

Incentivizing growth in cities also protects small towns from unwanted development and preserves Ohio’s farmland, he said.

“If Ohio wants to grow its population, it must grow the places where people choose to live, growth is welcome, and capacity and infrastructure exist,” Mr. Rue said. “A coordinated strategy to support and revitalize Ohio’s core cities will also benefit the interconnected suburban and rural communities within a metro region.”

In addition to the Ohio Core Cities Transformation Fund, the Ohio Mayors Alliance is proposing a new Public Safety Enhancement Fund.

Akron Mayor Shammias Malik said public safety is a city's most fundamental responsibility, noting Ohio's state and local governments employ more than 30,000 emergency responders such as police, firefighters, and EMS medics, among others.

Local governments spent more than \$3.2 billion on police and fire services in 2025, Mr. Malik said.

"We are putting our money where our mouth is when it comes to supporting public safety," he said. "We are proposing that the state help create a long-term, consistent, sustainable funding source that helps strengthen our ability to recruit and retain police officers, firefighters, and all of our safety personnel."

The Ohio Mayors Alliance's proposal would provide state dollars equal to 10 percent of the amount local governments spent on annual police and fire payroll. Using 2025's numbers, local governments would receive around \$320 million in state funding.

"This is a lot of money, but it is less money than we would still be receiving if the Local Government Fund had not been cut," Mr. Malik said. "We think that it is fair, and we think that budgets are moral documents."

The new fund would allocate money from the state General Revenue Fund directly to a city, village, or township. Eligible entities would register to receive the funds through the Ohio Office of Budget and Management or the Ohio Department of Public Safety on an annual basis, and they may be required to meet certain best-practices or professional policing standards.

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