

# Democrats want GOP action on foreclosures in Ohio

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With Ohio set to get \$172million in federal help to battle an ever-worsening foreclosure problem, state House Democrats and housing advocates say it's also time for Republicans to stop sitting on foreclosure-prevention bills.

Ten months ago, the Democratic-controlled House passed a bill that would impose a six-month moratorium on foreclosure filings in Ohio, regulate loan servicers and create a \$750 foreclosure filing fee to fund foreclosure counseling, education and rescue loans.

The bill has had one hearing in a Senate committee - more than two months ago. Four months ago, Republicans offered an alternative, requiring courts to offer mediation when a foreclosure action is filed. That bill remains in committee and has not had a hearing for nearly two months.

"There have been no serious attempts to deal with the legislation," said Rep. Mike Foley, D-Cleveland, a joint sponsor of the foreclosure bill, House Bill 3. "Some of us are very angry about that."

Ohio has seen record-breaking numbers of foreclosure filings for 14 straight years, including more than 89,000 in 2009.

Foley said he understands that Republicans have concerns about his bill, particularly the moratorium on foreclosures. "We're more than willing to let them mess around with it and bring something over."

Bill Faith, executive director of the Ohio Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, said: "We don't need a moratorium to have a good foreclosure-prevention bill."

Both Faith and Rep. Denise Driehaus, D-Cincinnati, a joint sponsor of House Bill 3, also said that the Republicans' mediation bill is a good idea that should be part of the package.

But Senate Republicans do not appear willing to move the bills soon.

Senate President Bill M. Harris, R-Ashland, did not convey a sense of urgency last week. "We're having hearings, and we'll see what the recommendation of the committee is."

Sen. Tom Niehaus of New Richmond, the Senate's No.2-ranking Republican, said he doesn't like the moratorium idea - "it delays the inevitable" - and also does not like the new \$750 foreclosure filing fee.

He said some local judges are already using the mediation process.

"Our focus has been on addressing the systemic reason for foreclosures, and that's the lack of jobs," he said. "The underlying problem is people don't have the income to pay those mortgages."

Driehaus said that argument "ignores the impact of foreclosures on the economy, in the small-business districts in these neighborhoods."

Faith said that although the \$172 million in federal money is important, it is a one-time shot of funds, and Ohio still needs long-term solutions. The Obama administration wants states to funnel help to unemployed workers who are trying to make their monthly mortgage payments, or to provide incentives for financial institutions to modify troubled mortgages.

"There is nothing about that money that replaces the need for the state legislation that is currently pending," Faith said.

Democrats also want to see the Senate move House Bill 9, which the House passed nearly 11 months ago. It would protect tenants when their residences are thrust into foreclosure.

"Individuals are being thrown out of their houses every week," said sponsor Rep. Ted Celeste, D-Grandview Heights.

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