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# OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

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## Bill Analysis

**Version:** As Introduced

**Primary Sponsors:** Sens. Brenner and Huffman

Austin C. Strohacker, Attorney

### SUMMARY

- Permits owners of residential property or their agents to request the immediate removal of an unlawful occupant when certain conditions are met.
- Expands the definition of criminal mischief to include unlawfully detaining, occupying, or trespassing upon a residential dwelling and intentionally causing damage to the dwelling.
- Creates a criminal offense specific to title fraud.

### DETAILED ANALYSIS

#### Removal of unauthorized occupants

Under continuing law, when an unauthorized occupant refuses to leave real property, the property owner may obtain a writ of execution through a Forcible Entry and Detainer action. Within ten days after receiving a writ of execution, a sheriff, police officer, constable, or bailiff must restore the property owner to possession of the premises.<sup>1</sup> The bill establishes an alternative nonjudicial process under which certain property owners and their agents may request the county sheriff to remove an unauthorized occupant.

#### Conditions and limitations

In order for the sheriff to remove an unauthorized occupant under the process created by the bill, all of the following conditions must be met:

- The requester is the record owner of the real property or the owner's agent;

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Chapter 1923.

- The real property includes a residential premises, and the record owner has the exclusive right to occupy the premises;
- The unauthorized occupant unlawfully entered the property and remains in the residential premises;
- The residential premises was not open to the public at the time the unauthorized occupant entered;
- The record owner directed the unauthorized occupant to leave the residential premises;
- The unauthorized occupant is not a member of the record owner’s immediate family – i.e., a spouse residing in the same household; full- or half-siblings; biological children, adopted children, or stepchildren; parents; and grandparents;
- There is no pending litigation related to the real property or the residential premises between the record owner and the unauthorized occupant.<sup>2</sup>

## **Complaint**

If all of the conditions described above are met, the owner or the owner’s agent may file a complaint to have the unauthorized occupant removed. The bill provides the form to which the complaint must substantially adhere. The form consists primarily of sworn affirmations as to the conditions precedent to removing an unlawful occupant under the new procedure. However, it also requires certain additional items such as:

- The date the record owner acquired the property;
- A copy of the record owner’s government-issued identification or, if the form is submitted by the record owner’s agent, documents evidencing the agent’s authority to act on the record owner’s behalf;
- An acknowledgment that the record owner or agent may be civilly liable for making false statements in the complaint or wrongfully using the removal process.<sup>3</sup>

## **Notice and removal**

Upon receiving a complaint to remove an unauthorized occupant, the sheriff, a police officer, constable, or bailiff must verify that the complainant is the owner of the property or the owner’s agent and appears to meet the conditions for the alternative, nonjudicial removal process. Once verified, the sheriff or other officer is required to serve notice “without delay” that the unauthorized occupant must immediately vacate the property. Notice may be served by hand or posted on the front door of the property. The sheriff or other officer must also attempt to verify the identities of unauthorized occupants and may arrest them if legally appropriate.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. 1923.16(A); R.C. 1349.04(A)(2), not in the bill.

<sup>3</sup> R.C. 1923.16(B).

<sup>4</sup> R.C. 1923.16(C).

sheriff or other officer is entitled to a \$60 service fee, to be paid by the record owner or agent that made the complaint.<sup>5</sup>

After delivering notice, the owner or their agent may request that the sheriff or other officer stand by to keep the peace while the owner or agent removes the unauthorized occupier's personal property and changes the locks. The sheriff or other officer may charge the owner or their agent a reasonable hourly rate to do so. The sheriff or other officer is not liable to the unauthorized occupant for loss, destruction, or damage to their property. The owner or their agent is also shielded from liability for such damages unless the removal was wrongful.<sup>6</sup>

### **Wrongful removal**

If a person is wrongfully removed from real property, they may bring a civil action for wrongful removal. A court may restore possession of the real property to the person wrongfully removed and award actual damages, statutory damages of triple the fair market rent of the residential premises, court costs, and attorney's fees.<sup>7</sup>

## **Criminal prohibitions**

### **Criminal mischief**

The bill expands the definition of criminal mischief to include a prohibition on unlawfully detaining, occupying, or trespassing upon a residential dwelling and intentionally causing damage to the dwelling. A violation of this prohibition is a felony of the second degree.<sup>8</sup>

### **Title fraud**

The bill creates a new criminal prohibition for title fraud. A person commits title fraud when they knowingly do any of the following:

- With the purpose to detain or remain upon real property, present to another person a false document purporting to be a valid lease, agreement, deed, or other instrument conveying real property rights;
- List or advertise residential real property that the purported seller has no legal title or authority to sell;
- Rent or lease residential real property that the purported owner has no lawful ownership in to another person.

A violation of the first category of title fraud is a misdemeanor in the first degree. A violation of the second or third categories is a felony of the first degree.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> R.C. 1923.16(D); R.C. 311.17(A)(7), not in the bill.

<sup>6</sup> R.C. 1923.16(E).

<sup>7</sup> R.C. 1923.16(F).

<sup>8</sup> R.C. 2909.07.

<sup>9</sup> R.C. 2913.53.

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## HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	01-22-25

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