

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF LEAH MERRITT  
OHIO COUNCIL OF YWCAs  
BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
FINANCE COMMITTEE, CHAIRMAN SCOTT OESLAEGER  
Sub.H.B.166  
MAY 6, 2019

Chairman Oeslaeger, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, I am Leah Merritt, President and CEO of YWCA Mahoning Valley and a member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs. Our Council is made up of the 14 YWCA chapters across the State, and we are committed to our goals of eliminating racism and empowering women.

I am providing proponent testimony in favor of an amendment to Sub.H.B. 166, which will be sponsored by Representative Romanchuk that earmarks \$1.4 million to support specific programming in YWCA chapters that provide direct services to women and children victimized by gender-based violence throughout the State, and to continue and expand community outreach through youth development and prevention programs. More specifically, the amendment would support Council programs that:

- Prevent domestic violence,
- Support victims of domestic violence,
- Provide trauma-informed services for survivors of domestic violence, and
- Support outreach and development opportunities youth development programming.

These services would include emergency shelters, crisis hotline support and non-residential services. We provide wraparound services that address gender-based violence, including trauma-informed support for survivors such as counseling, case management, substance abuse services and prevention education in the community.

Our member organizations reached more than 90,000 women, girls and family members last year through our programming. Our current sources of funding – Federal or private – are insufficient to meet ongoing needs of the communities and vulnerable populations we serve. The requested funds will increase our ability to serve more individuals in need, improve program quality and increase the impact of those we serve.

Each year, demand for the services we provide grows, as our programming is much vaster than the two areas for which we are seeking funding. Our major programs include subject matters that address human trafficking and gender violence prevention, as well as Women and Girls' empowerment, economic development, leadership, family development (including teen family development), health and wellness, senior community service, and racial justice and civil rights. A significant percentage of people we serve are people of color and individuals living in poverty.

Our programs are curriculum based and outcome-centered, and we sustain active service partnerships and referral channels throughout our respective communities. Finally, we provide a variety of educational opportunities for youth as part of wraparound services.

In 2018, YWCA Mahoning Valley served over 10,300 individuals through empowerment programs, housing, childcare and youth development, and racial justice and advocacy programs. As of May 1, 2018, YWCA Warren merged with YWCA Youngstown to form YWCA Mahoning Valley. The overarching goal of this project was to increase the reach and efficiency of the YWCA to deliver the mission of eliminating racism and empowering women. YWCA Mahoning Valley is able to present a unified voice with common goals and leverage additional funding and partnerships to increase impact in Mahoning and Trumbull counties. This regional collaboration between the two counties has allowed us to increase our reach to girls, women and families. Similarly, we anticipate increased impact on programming through this collaborative amendment presented by the Ohio Council of YWCAs that serves more than 90,000 women, girls and families all over Ohio.

The requested funds would be a line-item appropriation in TANF Block Grant funding, which will not cost the state any General Revenue Funds as it is an allocation of federal pass-through dollars.

The Governor's proposed budget requested substantial resources be devoted to areas in social services to protect the most vulnerable Ohioans in H.B.166, and the substitute bill can be improved with a commitment to support programming in organizations such as ours that are also on the front lines to address those we serve. We believe our funding request is consistent with that priority.

Chairman Oeslager, we urge the Committee to favorably consider the amendment request.