



FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Chairman Romanchuk
Ranking Member West

Adam Shank, Executive Director, Ohio Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
Destiny Tillison, 2019 Ohio Youth of the Year

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for hearing our testimony today. My name is Adam Shank and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs. Our Alliance is the statewide voice for the 16 Clubs operating sites in over 60 communities here in Ohio, the shared mission of which is to enable all young people, especially those that need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. With me today is Ohio's 2019 Youth of the Year, Destiny Tillison. We are here to offer testimony on the budget regarding Ohio's TANF Block Grant.

In the last biennium budget, Ohio Clubs received a line-item appropriation of \$1M in TANF Block Grant funding each fiscal year. We respectfully request that, that line-item be continued and increased to \$2M each fiscal year. At this proposed level of funding, which will not cost the state anything as it is an allocation of federal pass-through dollars, Clubs will be able to serve more than double the underwritten number of at-risk youth, improve program quality and increase the impact on those served while extending programming in critical areas focused on evidence based opioid prevention, workforce development, and mental health interventions.

Administered by Jobs and Family Services, current funding requires programming for **2,400** eligible youth in each of two focus areas. While this funding contractually underwrites only a small portion of our served population, the impact of these dollars is felt on a broad scale. Each year Boys & Girls Clubs across Ohio open their doors to over **43,000** youth. Access to TANF resources is critical to program quality, Club operations, and continued community access as demand continues to grow across the state.

TANF funding does much more than provide a year's worth of programming to kids at \$200 a piece. It provides for caring, professional staff that not only support these programs but create a loving, supportive environment which is the number one reason why kids come to us in the first place. It keeps Clubs open in communities where they are needed most. It allows for increased teen services during out-of-school time where they are statistically

more likely to engage in at-risk behavior. It allows for extended hours which can literally save lives. It helps Clubs provide the over 1M free meals and snacks to kids each year because it is hard to learn and grow when you are hungry. And for every dollar we get here from state government, it helps raise four times that amount from the community, corporations, and private individuals. TANF dollars have proven a strong catalyst for growth and an important resource for sustainability across the state.

Collectively Boys and Girls Clubs are the second largest youth development organization in the Ohio—second only to the public education system. In fact, with afterschool and summer options, Ohio Clubs can offer more hours of programming over the course of a year than schools. Coupled with a national network of programming, measurement tools, and operational support, the Ohio Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs is a critical partner in the state with the capacity and proven track record of delivering results. Thanks to a commitment to data driven processes and programs we know that in Ohio:

- 54% of Boys & Girls Club alumni say the Club literally saved their life;
- Club 12th graders are 26% more likely to abstain from drugs and alcohol than their peers nationally;
- 97% of Club teens expect to graduate on time; and
- ***For every \$1 invested in Boys & Girls Clubs, the State of Ohio and its communities recognize \$11.35 in economic benefits.***¹At the proposed level of funding that is a \$45.4M return on investment.

While these and other statistics help confirm the positive impact TANF funding has through our Clubs, the true reach of this investment can be found in the lives it touches directly. I'd like to invite Ohio's 2019 Youth of the Year, Destiny Tillison to share with you what the Club has meant to her.

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10 different schools. 7 elementary schools. Dozens of lost memories. And a constant fear of hopelessness. Hi, I'm Destiny Tillison and this was my childhood.

Growing up, I made sure not to open up, or get too close to anyone because I didn't know how long we would stay this time and if I could handle another lost relationship. When I was 5, my mother left my father after years of domestic abuse. Following this split, I was moved from house to house and city to city. My mother always ensured that me and my siblings had a roof over our head, but after her relationship with my father ended, I lost a part of my mother.

¹Institute for Social Research and the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan (December, 2015).

She would drop me and my siblings off at one of her friends houses where we would stay for a few days or even weeks. Never knowing when we would see her again. During this time period, my sister and I were told to stay in the attic of the house with our baby brother. Our “babysitter” would show us the pictures my mom would post with groups of friends at nice restaurants and clubs sometimes, as if she was mocking us. My mother always told us she had to leave us because she didn’t have the money to support us. So why was she out having fun while we suffered? Why didn’t she miss us like we missed her? When she would pick us up, something was always different. Her hair would be longer, she would be in a different car, she would be happy.

She would come get us like nothing had happened. Once she would take us home, we thought things would be different; better. And for the first day or two, they would be. She would promise us that she wouldn’t leave again. Soon after this honeymoon phase, reality set in. She would leave us each night and get picked up by random cars. When she was with us, she was on the phone talking and laughing while the stomachs of me and my siblings growled and my baby brother sat in his last diaper. We stayed in a house with no carpet, no heat, and no hope.

One night when my mother had left, we heard someone coming through our window down stairs. I put my little brother in the closet and prayed that he didn’t cry. My sister and I didn’t know what to do. We were 7 and 8 years old alone with no phone. Thankfully, a neighbor had seen the person crawling through the window and came in with his gun. I cried. I couldn’t see the bright future ahead of me that the teachers at school talked about. I longed for the father I hadn’t had. Someone to keep me safe from everything around me.

Soon after this night child services were called to the house. My mom gave me and my sister a long talk on what to say and how to answer each question asked of us. She warned us that we would get taken away from her if we didn’t say the right things. I told the lady that my mom was always home, that we always had food, and that I never felt in danger. I lied.

I always felt alone, my mom always sold our food stamps, and I never felt safe. I was 7 years old and I felt hopeless. My mom couldn’t afford or care enough to put me in sports, so I knew that I had to do well in school if I wanted to go to college. I pushed myself and my siblings to work hard no matter the circumstances. I have been on honor roll my entire academic career. Even the days when I had to miss school to watch my younger brothers, I always found a way to get my work done.

Years later after being moved around from school to school, my father came back into my life. I was now in high school and didn’t care too much for a relationship with him. However, after tension levels rose in my mother’s house, my sister and I wound up in Orrville living with our father. I had to leave all of my friends my junior year of high school. I felt like the world was against me.

That is until I was told about the Orrville Area Boys and Girls Club. My father worked second shift so I went to the Club after practice for a meal, homework help, and love. While I was at school my father was home and when I was home my father was at work. It was a rarity seeing each other throughout the week. Going to the Club, gave me the privilege of having someone to talk to whenever I felt like I had no one else.

If it weren't for the club, many nights after practice I would have went without a meal. Growing up homework help did not exist in my home. If I didn't understand something it was my responsibility to figure it out alone. Whenever I became a member at the Club, I received help with my homework for the first time in my life. These things alone lessened my worries and stress tremendously

Going to the Club gave me something to look forward to. It gave me something I hadn't had before... HOPE. The Orrville Area Boys and Girls Club has had and continues to have a large impact on my life. An impact that can only be fully understood to those who have grown up through the club. The Club is and will always be my home and I look forward to the day when I am able to give back to the organization.

Through the help and love of the Club, I know what my future looks like. I will be attending Cleveland State University in the Fall majoring in Pre Law and Psychology. After completing my undergraduate, I will attend law school. I will be successful. When I'm feeling down I always remember one thing,

"I have worked too hard to fail"

Failure is the lack of success.

Things may not always go how I plan, but I will never fail.

I will never fail because I will never stop working. I will never settle and I will never be satisfied.

Please continue to support Boys & Girls Clubs in Ohio.

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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, members of the Committee, thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.