

**Senate Finance Committee
Barbara Siemer Testimony
Wednesday, June 5, 2019**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the committee. My name is Barbara Siemer. I am a community advocate and investor who has spent decades focused on helping homeless and low-income families in Ohio and across the country. In 2011, my husband, Al Siemer, and I started the Siemer Institute with the goal of enhancing educational opportunities for school-aged children by preventing family homelessness and reducing school instability nationwide.

Since 2011, the Institute has developed partnerships with the United Way's in more than 50 communities across the country. The Institute currently partners with five United Ways in Ohio (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo) to oversee family stability programs that function as an early intervention for children susceptible to becoming multi-system youth.

The programs we fund support families with school-age children that are at risk of becoming homeless by focusing on housing stability, increasing income, reducing school mobility and providing two-generation programming to help families stabilize and thrive. We promote a two-generation approach that meets the needs of children and adults simultaneously to foster academic success and break the cycle of poverty.

In each of the five Ohio communities, programs are designed and managed by the local United Way, allowing direct services to be provided by the strongest nonprofit partners in their communities. Each program is unique, but they all work toward the same goals – stable housing, stable schooling and higher income.

In 2018, Siemer Institute-supported programs across Ohio served 884 families with 2,271 children. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of families obtained or maintained stable housing. Nearly 54 percent of families increased their incomes to a more sustainable level. Finally, 98.5 percent of families were able to avoid unplanned, disruptive school moves. Together, these results suggest that supporting families in a holistic manner before they lose their housing effectively helps families achieve lasting stability. The ability to leverage state funding, which we request as a \$1,000,000 earmark of TANF dollars, would mean the expansion of the Stable Families to serve nearly 1,300 families and roughly 3,250 children in Ohio in 2019, and we'll serve even more families and children in 2020.

Because our programs keep children in school and on a path to graduation, we reduce the need for additional community services and other forms of aid. Studies have shown that it is 5 to 9 times more expensive to serve families who become homeless than it is to keep them in their homes. Simply, funds spent on stability efforts improve the lives of those being served while reducing the number of children and families that may need greater, and more expensive, interventions. Given the demonstrable success these efforts have generated, we are constantly looking for partners and additional funding to further our reach and create a greater impact.

I would therefore respectfully request consideration of funding through the TANF Block Grant line item to help us expand our mission and reach more children and families. Our programs directly advance the enumerated purposes of TANF, especially by reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage.

I would like to personally thank Senator Stephanie Kunze for her continued leadership in advocating for Ohio children and families and her support of our request for a TANF line item. As a result, I am confident we would be able to leverage the funds to better serve our targeted population while also ensuring these families and children are less dependent on other governmental and nonprofit support systems. We plan to match every dollar of TANF funding received with foundation support and other private contributions to further amplify the effect of any funding.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our request.