

**Senate Finance Committee  
Barbara Siemer Testimony  
Monday, May 13, 2021**

Hello Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance 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. I come before the Committee today to request renewal of the current TANF Block Grant earmark which has been used to support these efforts through the Siemer Institute Family Stabilities Program.

Since 2011, the Institute has developed partnerships with the United Way's in more than 53 communities across the country. The Institute currently partners with six United Ways in Ohio (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Summit Medina) 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 Ohio communities where we currently operate, 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.

As a result of the support of this body, House Bill 166 of the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly earmarked \$1 million dollars per fiscal year from the TANF Block Grant line-item to the Family Stability Programs. These state funds were matched by private contributions, consistent with our efforts to expand the reach of these programs as widely as possible. This braided funding has allowed the Siemer Institute and its United Way partners across the state to provide approximately \$2,827,500 in funding to families in need.

When we asked for this money in 2019, our goal was to serve 1,300 families and roughly 3,250 children a year, an increase from the 884 families and 2,271 children we served with private dollars alone. The support provided by TANF dollars has allowed to shatter those goals. The family stability programs have already served 2,000 families and 5,300 children in 2020. By the end of June, we anticipate having served close to 3,000 families. Crucially, a third of the per family intervention costs is funded from TANF dollars. Simply put, the support of the State has allowed us to continue to expand the reach of these critical programs and to successfully provide the tools necessary for families to accomplish stable housing, stable schooling, and higher income.

The success we have accomplished is supported by real world data. In the current year, we have prevented nearly 100% percent of the disruptive school moves that are the initiator of so many subsequent educational and behavior problems. Moreover, 75% of the families we work with have obtained or maintained stable housing due to our program's two-generation approach to counseling and intervention. In other words, we are not just stopping the disruptive school move that results in educational set-back and learning loss, we are providing the tools for entire families to establish a firm foundation for growth and improvement.

In addition to our track record of results, we now have the benefit of partnering with the Department of Jobs and Family Services over a two-year budget cycle. This proves that our programs and methods are TANF eligible, something that can at times be overlooked during the budget process. We also know that using TANF funds for the preventative and early-intervention efforts of the Families Stability Program saves the state in other areas. 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 put, 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 that the current TANF Block Grant earmark be renewed for the upcoming biennium. As was the case during the last budget, the Siemer Institute will continue to match the requested \$1 million per fiscal year earmark dollar for dollar with private contributions. I am confident we will be able to continue to use these funds to better serve our targeted population while also ensuring these families and children are less dependent on other governmental and nonprofit support systems.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our request.