



United Way  
of Greater Cincinnati

## **TESTIMONY OF KRISTINA SCOTT TO THE HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE APRIL 20, 2023**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for allowing me to submit interested party testimony on Sub H. B. No. 33 in support of a TANF Block Grant line item.

My name is Kristina Scott, and I am the public policy and advocacy director at United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which serves Brown, Clermont, and Hamilton Counties. I have also led Learn to Earn Dayton and served as the executive director at Alabama Possible, which works to break down barriers to prosperity in one of our nation's poorest states.

When I think about breaking down barriers to prosperity, I think about people like Kurt. Kurt worked at collection agencies for many years. He contacted people about past-due bills even while he struggled to make ends meet. Paying the bills is quite different than building a future for himself and his young daughter.

Kurt wanted financial security and thought he could find it as a truck driver. However, he could not afford the commercial driver's license (CDL) course he needed. Nor could he afford to miss paychecks during four weeks of full-time training.

That's where United Way's Project Lift initiative came in. Project Lift is a public-private partnership that removes barriers and supports families committed to building a stronger financial foundation. By working with Project Lift sponsor organizations – which include social service agencies, faith-based communities and others – families receive flexible, tailored, short-term assistance that puts them on a path to long-term success.

Project Lift helped pay Kurt's truck driving school tuition and cover his basic living expenses while he was in school.

Kurt passed the CDL exam and quickly got a job with a waste-management company driving a tanker truck that removes waste from local construction sites. Kurt's income is almost double what it was a few years ago, and he's now saving for something he once thought impossible: buying his own home.

To enroll in Project Lift, families must have at least one child in the household and be working or on a path to employment. Each family agrees to participate in the program for at least one year.

Since April 2019, Project Lift has worked with more than 1,800 families like Kurt's. More than 200 families reported at least a 20% increase in income, and more than 450 families overcame significant barriers to self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, eligibility is currently limited to Hamilton County residents.

I respectfully request consideration of a \$250,000 annual TANF Block Grant line item. United Way of Greater Cincinnati's donors will match the TANF funds dollar for dollar, resulting in annual funding of \$500,000. This \$500,000 annual investment means Project Lift can expand to Brown and Clermont Counties, collaborate with 12 additional community agencies such as long-time United Way partners like Child Focus, and serve 250 families.

I would like to personally thank Representative Jean Schmidt for her continued leadership in advocating for Ohio children and families and her support of our request for this TANF line item.

I would also like to thank Representative Sara Carruthers for her support of the Siemer Institute's request for a TANF line item supporting its Family Stability programs across Ohio. We partner with the Siemer Institute and other Ohio United Ways to support families with school-age children who are at risk of becoming homeless. In Cincinnati, we work with Santa Maria Community Services. We supported 101 families in the Price Hill community and 100 percent of families that completed the program maintained or improved their housing stability and affordability.

The Project Lift and Family Stability initiatives both directly advance the enumerated purposes of TANF, especially by assisting needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or the homes of relatives and ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our requests.