



**Interested Party testimony submitted to the
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
House Bill 33
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Kanika Williams, Parent of ODA scholar
Open Doors Academy
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Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33. Open Doors Academy (ODA) provides afterschool programs, summer camps, scholar travel opportunities, and year-round family engagement programming to kids and young adults across Northern and Central Ohio. We are not a school. We do not receive per pupil funding. We are an educational non-profit organization, and our mission is to protect, inspire, nurture, and challenge youth to reach their full potential. ODA is based in Cleveland and serves more than 1,600 kids and families each year.

In the last budget, ODA was awarded \$2.3 million in TANF funds each fiscal year to support and grow our programming. As a result of this investment, five afterschool programs were added or expanded at Firelands Local Schools, Lima City Schools, Mansfield City Schools, and Sandusky City Schools. Today, ODA has 20 programs in eight school districts, and we continue to receive requests to open additional programs at schools in the districts we serve, as well as schools that would like to open new programs in other areas of the state. **We ask for your support of an amendment to provide TANF funding for ODA, with an increase to \$2.8 million each fiscal year to sustain this growth.**

The majority of our scholars are African American and come from low income families. In fact, over 90% of our kids and families live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Our model is research-based and built on the belief that providing youth with a safe environment, caring adult relationships, and strong community partnerships builds a solid foundation to achieve their academic and career goals. We believe our outcomes speak to the success of our model: last year, on average, the more time a scholar spent in the program the greater the increase on his or her math proficiency, and since 2018, 100% of ODA students who spent two years in our high school program graduated high school.

ODA launched the Center for Out-of-School Advancement (COSA) in 2018 to elevate the field of out-of-school time (OST) education and programming as a key to breaking the cycle of multi-generational poverty. The Ohio Department of Education has recognized ODA's expertise in OST education, partnering with COSA to provide professional development and regional trainings to over 200 other OST programs across Ohio that serve over 40,000 kids. COSA strengthens the OST field for programs in all corners of the state that are recipients of Ohio's 21st Century Community Learning Center grants via a three-prong approach: helping OST programs build organizational capacity, conducting high quality research that promotes innovative models, and advocating for the field.

Many of our scholars' parents cannot afford childcare before and after school or during the summer. Our programs allow them to keep their jobs by providing a safe and reliable place for their children to continue learning beyond school hours. I'd like to introduce Kanika Williams, mother of 3 ODA scholars to share her story with the committee.

Hello, my name is Kanika Williams, I'm a parent of two current scholars who attend Open Doors Academy at Albert Bushnell Hart K-8 in Cleveland. I'm pleased to be here to share with you how special ODA is to me and my family. As a mother of four sons, we have a busy schedule, just like so many other families out here. I enrolled my children in ODA for a few reasons. First, this program is directly in the school, which is huge to me because my sons don't have to leave school and walk anywhere for after school programming, so I feel safe, which is less stressful for me. It is available for families at no cost, which is a big break for me financially. My children receive help with their homework, and they always have something positive to say about what they do at ODA after school. Finally, ODA offers resources for our whole family. I recently had to make transportation arrangements for my two scholars, one in 1st grade and one in 8th, and ODA's staff helped with the arrangements. These little things make this program so important.

Having programs for children to stay and learn like ODA leaves a lot of parents less worried about their children. The after school programs and summer programming is priceless. Thank you for letting me share my story and experience with you.

Again, I ask that you support an amendment to continue funding for ODA in the operating budget so that we can continue to work with children across Ohio to reach their full potential. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to answer any questions the committee may have.