



**Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee
HB 33- State Operating Budget
March 21, 2023**

Chair Carruthers and Ranking Member Liston - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of MY Project USA's funding request which would appropriate \$200,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service's TANF Block Grant for MY Project USA to provide mentoring, recreation, leadership, and literacy programming for at-risk youth.

My name is Katana Mullen, and I am the Youth Program Director for MY Project USA.

Growing up in a small town in rural WV, we were very poor, and I experienced a lot of loss. I was exposed to dysfunction, drug abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, and gun violence. There was no real outlet other than sports. It's what kept me grounded, focused, and safe. It was the only time I felt any kind of "normalcy." It is my inner child that yearns for safety, protection, and a positive way of life for the children I serve today. It is my hearts' desire to turn a negative into a positive and give back in a way that will impact future generations to come.

For many years, my heart has been dedicated to empowering youth in many capacities, including the non-profit sector, corporate level, local government, and working with inner city youth at Ohio State's Learning in Fitness and Education program.

When I found MY Project USA, I found a new home. I found a new family. I found hope. I wanted to be a part of MY Project USA because of its excellence in leading as a catalyst for protecting and empowering youth and uplifting families in this community and beyond. In overseeing our youth programs, I have witnessed these very things take place.

In this lifetime, we pray to continue to ignite hope and light in those with whom we cross paths. It is our mission to instill a love of learning in our youth. Our after-school programs are enriching, fun and supportive of our students' needs. We want our students to excel in all things in this life, so we make education a priority. We create spaces of hope for our students to flourish in.

Our soccer team, the Hilltop Tigers, continues saving and reaching so many children in this community we serve. Watching them play and practice with compassion and with the biggest smiles brings so much joy. Our evening programming allows students to come and have a safe space to enjoy recreation, educational learning, and positive peer engagement.

We've recently launched our MY Leaders program, and we are hopeful to train and mentor a group of young people to lead the way to a brighter future. A future that speaks to climate change and combats gun violence, gangs, poverty, and the injustices of this world.

We hear it all the time: "It takes a village." Yes, it absolutely does. This wouldn't work without our dedicated workers, partners, and volunteers. This wouldn't work without our donors and supporters who believe in our mission. Every child deserves someone who will keep fighting the good fight with them – someone who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can possibly be.

Our youth is our future, and we have a great responsibility to train, nurture and lead them into their path of greatness, whatever that looks like for each of them. This is my hope, and there is no doubt in my mind that I am called to this mission.

I respectfully ask you to support our amendment.

I can take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you.

Katana Mullen

MY Project USA Youth Program Director