



**Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education  
Interested Party Testimony  
HB 33 – FY24-25 State Operating Budget**

**Jane Christyson, Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of North East Ohio  
March 21, 2023**

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on House Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of the amendment which would appropriate \$100,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Education's Program and Project Support appropriation line for the Girl Scouts of North East Ohio's Equity Outreach Program.

My name is Jane Christyson, and I am CEO of the Girl Scouts of North East Ohio.

Girl Scouts is the largest leadership development program for girls in grades K-12. Girls who participate in the evidence-based *Foundational Girl Scout Experience* over a prolonged period achieve highly in five areas identified as essential to effective leadership.

Girl Scouts nurtures and support female talent by providing girls with the skills, training, professional networks, and tools to solve problems in spaces that are not equal.

Currently, Girl Scouts of North East Ohio serves nearly 18,000 girls across 18 counties in Northeast Ohio, with the help of over 9,000 adult volunteers. We serve over 2,500 girls from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and over 2,200 girls from low-income households. Throughout our 18-county footprint, we serve over 7,000 girls from small towns and rural communities. Consistent with GSNEO's promise to girls and their families to provide all girls in the council's footprint the foundational Girl Experience, we are leveraging partnerships and focusing on engaging marginalized communities.

Because we are so immersed in the leadership development of our girls, and through the studies done by the research arm of our national organization, we know that 1 in 3 girls report they're afraid to be a leader for fear that others will think they're bossy. **Additionally, 23% of girls in elementary school don't think they're smart enough for their dream job.** This number doubles in high school.

That is why we are committed to serving more girls, and a more diverse population of girls, with our programming. Girl Scouts of North East Ohio recently conducted a strategic initiative process which identified that the percentage of the population of Black girls GSNEO was serving lagged beyond the population in general. In 2021, the population of Black girls in the 18-county area was 19% and the population in the GSNEO was 7% of the total. To increase the number of Black girls GSNEO serves, the organization has established a strategic goal that its membership will reflect the population of Northeast Ohio and has created annual targets to move toward that goal. GSNEO has initiated long-term projects to better serve communities of color, leverage the assets they offer, and develop with them the full Girl Scout Leadership Experience, including cultivating interest, excitement, and confidence in STEM careers.

Building upon a successful model that GSNEO has deployed at the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority for over 20 years, GSNEO has initiated the Equity Outreach Program whereby a full-time staff person works

in under-resourced communities to recruit girls of color and volunteers; organize and lead troops in community centers, libraries, and places of worship; and develop the volunteer and community infrastructure to support Girl Scouting in the community over the long term.

Consensus among Girl Scout leadership is that recruiting volunteer troop leaders in under-resourced communities is challenging because of time commitment barriers such as single-parent families, parents holding jobs during non-traditional hours that do not allow for troop-leading opportunities, and limited financial resources. Yet when GSNEO provides a staff troop leader through the Equity Outreach Program, the cultivation of the troop is extremely well received by the youth and community. In 2018-2019, the girls' measured outcomes at the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Girl Scout Program included: girls developing a strong sense of self (86% of girls), gaining positive values (53%), building healthy relationship skills (47%), and increasing problem-solving skills (64%).

We are working to scale the Girl Scouts Equity Outreach Program, which will develop and sustain Girl Scout troops in a staff-led model within urban cores. Underserved youth will have the opportunity to participate in the Foundational Girl Scout Experience, an evidence-based program that helps girls develop personally, gain a positive identity and confidence; form and maintain healthy relationships; identify problems, create action plans to contribute to the world in ways that are meaningful to them and their community. Research has shown that compared to other women, Girl Scout alums are more ambitious, less afraid of risks, more confident, and more likely to stand up for their beliefs and values.

We believe the goals of the Girl Scouts Equity Outreach Program align with Ohio's Strategic Plan for Education, *Each Child, Our Future*, which calls out equity as the first core principle, noting that: "Ohio's greatest education challenge remains equity in education achievement for each child."<sup>1</sup> One of the Ohio Department of Education's *Task Force on Best Academic Practice Models for Black Students* purposes is to identify best academic and best non-academic practice models, strategies and actions that are successful in schools and districts that have closed the achievement gap for Black students in Ohio schools.<sup>2</sup>

Research has shown that non-academic supports and relationships with caring adults are critical to closing achievement gaps for Black students.<sup>3</sup> A December 2016 study by the Girl Scout Research Institute of a nationally representative sample of girls showed Girl Scouts are more likely than non-Girl Scouts to have adults in their lives who help them pursue their goals and think about their future.<sup>4</sup>

Girl Scouts of North East Ohio respectfully requests your approval of the amendment that will include \$100,000 per fiscal year in the Ohio Department of Education's Program and Project Support line to scale the GSNEO Equity Outreach Program. The funding will support staffing, program and general expenses, and administration of the program for two years and aims to establish 10 or more troops in under-resourced urban cores, reaching over 2000 minority girls with our effective leadership programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would like to now introduce my colleague, Fallon Pulley, Director, Girl Experience, to share some testimonials we received from girls who have participated in the Equity Outreach Program to date.

M. Jane Christyson, Chief Executive Officer  
Girl Scouts of North East Ohio

---

<sup>1</sup> Ohio's Strategic Plan for Education, *Each Child, Our Future*: <https://education.ohio.gov/About/EachChildOurFuture>

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Department of Education, Task Force on Best Academic Practice Models for Black Students: *Background and Purpose*: <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Equity-in-Education/Task-Force-on-Best-Practice-Models-for-Black-Stude/Task-Force-Background-and-Purpose>

<sup>3</sup> Education Week, *Nonacademic Skills Are the Necessary Foundation for Learning*, Stafford-Brizard, 2016, [www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-nonacademic-skills-are-the-necessary-foundation-for-learning/2016/07](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-nonacademic-skills-are-the-necessary-foundation-for-learning/2016/07)

<sup>4</sup> *The Girl Scout Impact Study, A Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute*, 2017: [https://www.girlscouts.org/content/dam/girlscouts-gusa/forms-and-documents/about-girl-scouts/research/GSRI\\_ImpactStudy\\_ExecutiveSummary\\_2017.pdf](https://www.girlscouts.org/content/dam/girlscouts-gusa/forms-and-documents/about-girl-scouts/research/GSRI_ImpactStudy_ExecutiveSummary_2017.pdf)