

**SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE TESTIMONY**  
**Kerry Lee Pedraza**  
**Executive Director, United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties**  
**May 31, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you to provide testimony in support of Substitute House Bill 33. I am here today to discuss HB 33's budget provisions regarding the United Way Collaborative.

My name is Kerry Lee Pedraza and for the past nine years I have had the privilege of leading the United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties as the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer. Prior to my work at United Way, I served as the Assistant Director of the Clark County Department of Job and Family Services. I was very proud of the work that was accomplished during my tenure as Assistant Director at Job and Family Services and continue to be grateful for your stewardship of public resources that assist our most vulnerable citizens in our three counties. In my position as CEO at United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties, I have a unique vantage point to be able to witness the incredible work that can occur through strong collaborations and partnerships when public, private and nonprofits work together to create even greater impact.

I ask you to support a \$1.8 million per fiscal year appropriation to directly support the United Way Collaborative. Investing in the United Way Collaborative goes far beyond supporting community-based programming that will improve the lives of thousands of Ohioans. This annual appropriation will serve as a critical catalyst for six United Ways to mobilize additional financial resources from business, individuals, and foundations. Specifically, this appropriation will allow additional access to effective, evidence-based literacy programs and additional case management services.

The three counties that I serve, Clark, Champaign, and Madison, are reflective of the diversity across this state: urban, rural, ethnicity and levels of poverty. As diverse as these counties are on many levels, one thing that all three share is poor literacy levels and lack of kindergarten readiness.

We are grateful for the work that is already taking place within the homes of our children, on the laps of parents and grandparents that read and carry on conversations with their kiddos, childcare centers, preschools, and school personnel that work tirelessly on behalf of our most vulnerable population. But, it is not enough. Nearly 37% of children in Madison County do not test at a level indicating they are ready for kindergarten, 83.5% in the Urbana City School District and 85% of children in the Springfield City Schools.

This appropriation will provide six United Ways across ten counties to do more collectively to expand, replicate, scale and/or enhance programs and strategies that are making the greatest impact. Together, our Collaborative will create a collective impact model that encourages efficient

and effective practices to be shared with economies of scale to be used across all partnering agencies.

As you can imagine there is not a one size fits all when moving the needle on kindergarten readiness because of the many variables involved. As part of this appropriation, flexibility for much needed case management is included. Kindergarten readiness not only involves working one-on-one with children but many of our most successful programs in Clark, Champaign and Madison Counties involve working directly with parents or other caregivers to ensure that they, to have the tools necessary to reinforce, encourage and model skills and practices needed to be successful when entering kindergarten.

With the additional funding that would be provided through this appropriation, successful programs like the SPARK, FAST, Kindergarten Readiness Camp and Reading Enrichment Programs can be expanded to allow for more participation in our three counties. We know that these programs work. The most recent data from the SPARK program indicates that 32% of the children involved in the program moved out of the Below Average category in reading and 48.1% of the children scored Above Average by the end of the program. We know these programs work, but additional funding is necessary to grow this and other successful programs.

The state of Ohio continues to invest in attracting and preparing a work ready workforce. A work ready workforce doesn't begin in middle and high school. It begins at the cradle where research shows that brain development is at its strongest. Literacy and Kindergarten Readiness is the foundation to creating a strong Ohio workforce. This is a small investment that will pay dividends in the future.

Thank you again Chairman Dolan and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Sincerely,

Kerry Lee Pedraza  
Executive Director  
United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties



# Madison County Board of Developmental Disabilities

www.themcbdd.com

Susan R. Thompson  
Superintendent

May 26, 2023

Administration

Family Support  
Services

Recreation  
Special Olympics

Transportation  
Services

500 Elm Street  
London, Ohio 43140  
(740) 852-7050  
(740) 852-7051 - Fax

Children Services

Fairhaven School  
510 Elm Street  
London, Ohio 43140  
(740) 852-7052  
(740) 852-7053 - Fax

A Non-Discriminatory  
Service Provider  
and  
Equal Opportunity  
Employer

Senator Matt Dolan, Chair  
Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
1 Capitol Square, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor – Room 127  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

## **RE: Budget Amendment SC1772 – United Way Collaborative**

Chairman Dolan:

On behalf of the Madison County Board of Developmental Disabilities, I would like to express our support for the proposed budget amendment SC1772 to fund the United Way Collaborative project including six (6) United Way agencies representing ten (10) Ohio counties, to serve vulnerable residents, families, children.

United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties has been working diligently to increase programs focused on Kindergarten Readiness and other evidence based early childhood education programs. It is well documented that children and families in Madison County continue to experience lasting effects from the pandemic and related economic uncertainties.

United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties along with the other six United Ways in the collaborative bring a unique ability to collaborate and partner with public and private entities while leveraging philanthropic dollars to maximize resources.

More specifically, this funding will assist some or all of the collaborating United Way agencies with capacity and resources to expand implementation of vital evidence-based early childhood education initiatives that result in measurable and positive outcomes for our youngest Ohioans. In addition, this budget amendment will provide resources for the United Way agencies to broaden and deepen partnerships with local schools, community organizations and other entities to deploy strategies aimed at increasing student achievement and academic success.

The requested funding also will support capacity building to enhance the partnering United Way agencies' ability implement programs that focus on enhanced case management for improved family stability. This includes increasing the ability of the United Way partner agencies and their community partners to respond to the ongoing needs of families and households experiencing economic hardships and to assist them to realize economic security and stability.

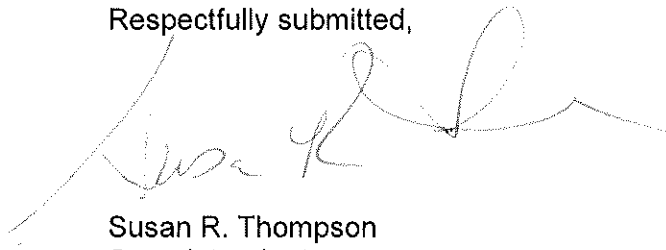
*Vision Statement: We will foster the abilities and dreams of people with developmental disabilities.*

*Mission Statement: To ensure supports for people with developmental disabilities and their families in making choices which will enrich their lives.*

These challenges impact all Ohio children, families and communities. The partnering United Way agencies play a vital role in addressing emergent and ongoing barriers to success, in strong collaboration with other community organizations, schools and government entities. This funding will provide the resources to deepen the impact of these agencies and ensure Ohio families and children have the support they need to thrive to their fullest potential.

The Madison County Board of Developmental Disabilities is in full support of the proposed budget amendment and plans to continue to collaborate with our local United Way along with the partnering United Way agencies. Should you have any questions or need for further information regarding our support for this budget amendment, please do not hesitate to contact me at [susan.thompson@madison.oh.gov](mailto:susan.thompson@madison.oh.gov) and/or 740-852-7050 ext 1820.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan R. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Susan R. Thompson  
Superintendent  
Madison County Board of DD