



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Sub. H.B. No. 33: Interested Party Written Testimony
Diane Downing, Executive Director, Say Yes Cleveland**

Dear Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I would like to present this testimony in support of Say Yes Cleveland's inclusion in Sub. H.B. 33.

Say Yes Cleveland is a historic public/private partnership that launched in 2019 with a strategy designed to significantly improve Cleveland's economy, neighborhoods, and workforce over the coming generations by breaking cycles of multigenerational poverty that create barriers to postsecondary attainment. To do this, Say Yes provides two crucial benefits to Cleveland's children: postsecondary tuition scholarships for all eligible high school graduates, and comprehensive support services for all students and their families from Pre-K through high school graduation.

Our model calls for our scholarship funds to be raised from the private sector, and Northeast Ohio's corporations, philanthropies, private individuals, and families have stepped up, already contributing nearly \$100 million toward a 25-year of college and career training scholarships for every eligible graduate. Say Yes support services and Family Support Specialists are funded through the collaborative efforts and funds of our local public partners, Cuyahoga County, the City of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Scholarship and support services funds are entirely separate, and one cannot be used for the other. However, scholarships and support services are co-equal pillars of Say Yes; sustaining our support services is a necessity to fully leveraging the historic private investment already made toward the Say Yes Cleveland scholarship fund.

Say Yes Cleveland is seeking one-time bridge funding from the State of Ohio in Sub. H.B. 33 to help close a gap in funding for our Family Support Specialists over the next two years. These State funds will be used along with the funds contributed by local public partners, including the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and partner charter schools.

We're grateful that the Ohio Senate's current bill does include part of the funding for Say Yes Cleveland's Family Support Specialists that had been included in the Ohio House's bill. This funding is critical to the continuation of Say Yes Cleveland over the next two years, and we're thankful for the General Assembly's support for this program. Our hope is as you consider the omnibus bill further, our urgent need for temporary State funding will encourage the restoration of the full funding amount originally approved by the Ohio House, so that the students and families we help don't face any disruption to our services.

While the State generously provides school funding in Cleveland and throughout Ohio for wellness programming, Say Yes support services are designed to be an intensive, personalized layer of assistance that is available to every student, and to their families. Our support services are designed to produce multiple outcomes, including helping students stay on track throughout their school careers, so they are prepared to take full advantage of Say Yes Cleveland college tuition scholarships after high school. The central component of our support services is a Family Support Specialist in all 104 CMSD and partner charter school buildings.

Family Support Specialist interventions and supports include everything from securing, and sometimes delivering, food assistance to families in need; getting a tutor for a student struggling with a subject; arranging for a free eye exam and free glasses for child who can't see the blackboard; finding emergency housing for a whole family in crisis; or connecting families fighting eviction to our free legal services. This school year, Say Yes FSS made 14,291 individual referrals to interventions or assistive programs, and they logged more than 67,000 case notes about individual students and families.

Temporary funding support from the State of Ohio is urgently needed if we are to continue the work of our Family Support Specialists over the next two years, after which, we are confident, we will have secured the long-term reimbursement of local funds from federal funding sources for our Family Support Specialists. Those solutions will take time to finalize, however, and without the State's bridge funding during the next two years, we will not have the funding to maintain the program in the interim. That would be a tragedy for the tens of thousands of children served by Say Yes Cleveland every year. Further, it could risk wasting the immense contribution our private sector has made to our scholarship fund.

Over the coming generations, Say Yes Cleveland can change lives, and change the future of this city, but only if we make certain that Cleveland's students are supported throughout their school careers so they can graduate ready to make the most of their scholarships. We would be deeply grateful for your assistance.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Diane Downing".

Diane Downing
Executive Director
Say Yes Cleveland