



**Testimony of Barbara Siemer, Founder, Siemer Institute  
Ohio Senate Health Committee  
Wednesday, May 10, 2023**

Good morning/afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is Barbara Siemer, and I am a retired educator and community advocate here today on behalf of the Siemer Institute. My years in the classroom showed me the detrimental effects of family instability on children's academic success. As a result, the Siemer Institute was officially launched in 2011, informed by research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation; however, the work began long before that in the mid-1990s. The Siemer Institute's continued mission is to invest in the potential of children through family stability. Here in Ohio, the Siemer Institute partners with United Way agencies in Akron, Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton and Toledo to implement two-generation family stability programs that reach families **before** they become homeless with housing stability interventions as well as strategies to increase household income. We work to simultaneously meet the needs of children and adults to foster academic success and interrupt the cycle of poverty. Research has shown that with a stable home, families thrive, and children are more able to succeed academically, socially and emotionally. Because Columbus is my hometown and one of our first program sites, we often highlight Columbus' exemplary work; however, we have successfully taken this model to scale in 69 cities across the country. I ask the Committee approve the budget earmark set forth in Am. Sub. House of \$1.5 million in each year of the biennium for TANF Block Grant line-item funding which has been used successfully in 6 Ohio cities through the Institute's Family Stability program.

One of the primary purposes of TANF is to provide assistance to families in need so that children may be cared for in their own homes. For the past 4 years, we've deployed TANF funding through the Siemer Institute. As a result, our Network has served over 8,000 Ohio families with 21,173 children. We've seen 79% of families reach housing stability and 60% increase their household income. Ninety-eight percent of children in our program have benefitted from school stability. In addition, TANF block grant funding is amplified through Siemer Institute matching funding which more than doubles the State's investment of \$4,000,000 over 4 years to \$8,675,000. This investment represents tremendous value for the State of Ohio and for Siemer Families. Interventions to prevent homelessness are far more cost effective than addressing issues after a family becomes homeless. Families that remain stably housed do not have to endure the trauma of losing their homes and possessions through disruptive, unplanned moves.

In 2022, the average cost of a Siemer Family Intervention was \$1,695. Our 4-year average cost was \$1,085 per family. One-third of that cost per family is funded by TANF. In comparison, an individual who is chronically unhoused costs Ohio taxpayers approximately \$35,578. We're serving Ohio families efficiently and effectively with TANF funding.



In 2022, Siemer Institute families faced record-high inflation rates, driven largely by sharp increases in the cost of housing and food. In June of 2022, inflation in the US peaked at

9.1%. Inflation rates have not risen this high since November 1981 when the rate was a staggering 10.1%. From 2019 to 2022, median monthly rent in Ohio has increased from \$813 per month to \$1,114 per month, a 37% increase. Families who come to us in crisis are among the least able to absorb unexpected and uncontrollable increases in the cost of rent and groceries. Stabilizing families using our evidence-based model helps families to navigate these challenges.

The Siemer Institute has been a good steward of TANF funding. We are grateful for your partnership over the past 4 years. I respectfully ask that you continue to partner with us as we invest in the potential of Ohio's children through family stability. Thank you for your time.