

**House Children and Human Services Committee
Testimony of David Reiersen
Vice President, Public Partnerships with United Way of Central Ohio
Thursday, February 27, 2025**

Hello Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Minority Member Lett and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee. My name is David Reiersen, and I am the Vice President, Public Partnerships with United Way of Central Ohio. I am here today on behalf of the Siemer Institute and our other partner United Ways in Greater Cleveland, Greater Cincinnati, Greater Dayton, Greater Toledo and Summit and Medina to offer our support for the \$2 million per fiscal year TANF Block Grant earmark provided to the Siemer Institute Family Stability Programs in Governor DeWine's as introduced budget.

Inspired by a vision of thriving children, strengthened families, and connected communities, Barb and Al Siemer created the Siemer Institute in 2011. Born, raised, and educated in Ohio, Barb and Al dedicated their professional careers to Ohio's manufacturing and education sectors. After raising children both in the home and in the classroom, they set a goal to invest in the potential of 1,000,000 children by funding programs that promote the stability of the whole family.

Fourteen years later, the Siemer Institute is a national, private philanthropic institution that collaborates with community-based funding partners in 79 cities across 41 states. By providing multi-year private funding and other vital resources, the Siemer Institute empowers its partners to implement community-appropriate solutions and build lasting, effective programs.

The expansion and growth of this public-private partnership across the country could only be possible through the innovation modeled by the Siemer's flagship investment, Ohio. By partnering with six United Ways serving fourteen counties, the public-private partnership between the Siemer Institute, ODJFS, and the Ohio United Way network continue to reach more Ohio families and our children each year.

The family stability programs in Dayton, Cleveland, Columbus, Akron, Toledo, and Cincinnati was first funded with TANF dollars in HB 166 of the 133rd General Assembly, where we received \$1 million dollars per fiscal year on the condition that we match all public funds dollar per dollar with private donations. When we asked for that money in 2019, the goal was to serve 1,300 families and roughly 3,250 children a year, an increase from the 884 families and 2,271 children we served with private dollars alone. The support provided by the legislature proved to be transformational – in the first year TANF dollars were provided and used to leverage private dollars, the Family Stability Programs were able to serve 2,000 families and 5,300 children. This success led to continued support from the General Assembly and the State. In HB 110 of the 134th General Assembly, the legislature again provided \$1 million per fiscal year, and this amount was increased in HB 33 of the 135th General Assembly to \$1.5 million per fiscal year. And, again due to our success and support from the administration, the Governor has proposed to increase the earmark to \$2 million per fiscal year in HB 96. All told, state support through TANF dollars over the last six years has allowed the Family Stability Programs to have served 13,086 families and 33,202 children. Simply put, the support provided by the General Assembly and the State has allowed us to continue to expand the reach of these critical programs and to successfully provide the tools necessary for families to accomplish stable housing, stable schooling, and higher income.

The success we have accomplished is supported by real world data. Through the current year, we have prevented 98% percent of the disruptive school moves that are the initiator of so many subsequent educational and behavior problems. Moreover, 79% of the families we work with have obtained or maintained stable housing due to our program's two-generation approach to counseling and intervention. In other words, we are not just stopping the disruptive school move that results in educational set-back and learning loss, we are providing the tools for entire families to establish a firm foundation for growth and improvement.

In addition to our track record of results, we now have the benefit of partnering with the Department of Jobs and Family Services over three consecutive budget cycles. This proves that our programs and methods are TANF eligible, something that can at times be overlooked during the budget process. We

also know that using TANF funds for the preventative and early-intervention efforts of the Families Stability Program saves the state in other areas. Because our programs keep children in school and on a path to graduation, we reduce the need for additional community services and other forms of aid. Studies have shown that it is 5 to 9 times more expensive to serve families who become homeless than it is to keep them in their homes. Simply put, funds spent on stability efforts improve the lives of those being served while reducing the number of children and families that may need greater, and more expensive, interventions. Given the demonstrable success these efforts have generated, we are constantly looking for partners and additional funding to further our reach and create a greater impact.

I would therefore respectfully request that the current TANF Block Grant earmark be maintained in the amount provided for in the Governor' s budget. We also welcome the inclusion of the matching funds requirement included in previous budgets, as it is the intent of the Siemer Institute to leverage private funds whether or not that requirement is set forth in law. I am confident we will be able to continue to use these funds to better serve our targeted population while also ensuring these families and children are less dependent on other governmental and nonprofit support systems.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our request. I am happy to answer any questions.