



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**House Children and Human Services Committee**

**House Bill 96**

**Ed Gernerchak, Senior Vice President of Behavioral Services & Executive Director of Y-Haven  
YMCA of Greater Cleveland**

**March 5, 2025**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Bob Kirschner, and I am the Chief Philanthropy Officer & Senior Vice President at the YMCA of Greater Cleveland.

The YMCA is a legacy organization in Cleveland, serving community needs since our founding in 1854. Over the past 171 years, we have evolved into a premier community-based service organization that provides health and wellness services, transitional housing, rehabilitation services, youth development, personal growth, and service to others. As a leader in holistic well-being, the YMCA enhances quality of life through our comprehensive programs and services. We are well positioned as a supportive community hub that fosters physical health, mental and emotional wellness, social connections, and personal growth, making the Y a vital partner in achieving overall well-being for individuals and families.

Our mission is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. The last two words of our mission statement – “for all” – guide us as we strive to prioritize access to our well-being facility and services to everyone regardless of their financial situation. In 2024, the YMCA of Greater Cleveland provided nearly \$700,000 in financial assistance – making our services available to the entire community.

Beyond administering a growing need for financial assistance, not everyone who can benefit from the YMCA's programs has easy access to one of our branches. This is why we created the Y on the Fly outreach program – a mobile YMCA that brings well-being programs directly to youth and families in their communities, eliminating barriers like transportation and cultural obstacles. Budgeted at \$157,000 for FY 2025, Y on the Fly provides healthy meals and snacks, educational and physical activities, swim safety lessons, and enrichment activities. This programming equips youth with the tools necessary to make positive choices, develop problem-solving skills, strengthen social connections, and promote emotional maturity – all while prioritizing accessibility and well-being.

In addition to Y on the Fly, through our Y-Haven program, we directly impact 600 women and men each year who are seeking to build a new life. Y-Haven provides services including Substance Use Disorder Treatment, Mental Health Counseling, Vocational Services, Community Housing, and an



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

array of cultural and recreational opportunities. Serving as the largest residential treatment provider in Ohio with 250 beds, Y-Haven offers evidence-based addiction treatment for individuals experiencing homelessness, re-entering the community from incarceration, or recovering from Opioid Use Disorder. Our addiction treatment outcomes are nearly three times the national average, with 71% of participants completing treatment, 92% engaged in post-residency services, and 70% indicating increased family and social supports. We also proudly report a 0% recidivism rate in 2024.

The YMCA of Greater Cleveland is also dedicated to expanding mental health services across our community. In collaboration with Case Western Reserve University's Community Innovation Network (CIN), we surveyed our members, explored local community assets, and designed a program to integrate mental health services into our facilities. Based on this research, we have appointed a behavioral health manager to oversee and implement services at two of our twelve locations in 2024 – Hillcrest Family YMCA in Lyndhurst and the Warrensville Heights Family YMCA – including professional counseling, support groups, and educational workshops on topics such as grief and loss, teen mental health, and substance use recovery. These services align with the YMCA's mission to nurture a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

As part of our commitment to mental health, we are working to transform each of our branches into dedicated "Mental Wellness" hubs. The response to these services has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are excited to expand this program to all our branches across Northeast Ohio. To support this growth and ensure the sustainability of these services, we are requesting \$1 million in funding for each fiscal year to assist with improving access to mental wellness services for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.