



**Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee
HB 96- State Operating Budget
March 13, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla and Ranking Member Sweeney - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget, in support of MY Project USA's funding request which would appropriate \$350,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service's TANF Block Grant for MY Project USA to provide mentoring, recreation, leadership, and literacy programming for at-risk youth.

My name is Bashir Ahmed and I serve as the Head coach of Hilltop Tigers and the youth coordinator MY Project USA.

First and foremost, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to stand before you and voice our needs and struggles. Our goal at My Project USA is building a brighter future for our youth and their families, particularly in the Hilltop neighborhood.

Over the last 10 years, MY Project USA has made a remarkable \$45 million impact on our community and have served more than 500,000 clients including 220,000 youth. Together, we have successfully curbed the pipeline to gangs and drugs in the Wedgewood Village Apartments on the westside of Columbus. We have transformed at-risk youth into soccer champions through our Hilltop Tigers Soccer Club—a program that has become a beacon of hope for families. This club has instilled discipline, mentorship, and purpose into the lives of hundreds of youth, many of whom have gone on to college and become leaders in their own right.

Just last year we had 8 of our own youth take a huge step in their lives and graduate highschool. Through peer support, resources and mentoring we are proudly able to say we were a part of that journey towards success. Even now as I speak to you 5 of them are now students at Columbus State furthering their education and aspiring to become the next pillars of support for their community. This shows how much potential resides in these communities and with the right support and guidance we can reshape and help direct our youth in our city to become the next leaders, doctors, engineers, therapists and professionals to help make the change within.

Let me highlight a few more of our milestones and accomplishments with the help of the City of Columbus and other funders:

- \$4 million in 450 contractors and employees, creating jobs and projects that uplift our community.
- \$1.3 million into capital upgrades and property to enhance the neighborhood.
- 5.5 million meals and snacks worth \$27.5 million to fight food insecurity.
- \$150,000 worth of free vaccinations and health screenings.
- \$30 million worth of in-kind donations passed to more than 200,000 clients
- Most importantly, we've empowered more than 900 youth over the years to become leaders and advocates for their community. Addressing guns gangs, food insecurity, climate action and more!

These numbers represent real lives changed, families strengthened, and neighborhoods transformed. But today, I must share the challenges we are facing.

In 2024, we received no financial support from the City Council. Because of this, and restrictions tied to TANF funding, we've been forced to scale back programs like the Hilltop Tigers Soccer Club. Starting this September, we are only able to serve 70 youth weekly—less than half of the 150 we have served in prior years. Each kid is only getting 2-3 days with us.

I was raised in South Park and have been trying to save children for years. I know for a matter of fact that Hilltop Tigers not being funded can move several children back into gangs and this could happen in days, not even months.

Unfortunately, due to restricted, reimbursable grants, MY Project USA is also currently navigating a \$215,000 cash flow crisis, jeopardizing the sustainability of our programs.

Despite these challenges, we remain resolute in our commitment to serving our community. But the truth is, we cannot do it alone. We need help to keep our pantry, community resource programs and soccer programs up and running.

Your past support has been crucial to our success, and we are deeply grateful for it. We ask you now to stand with us again. With your renewed investment, we can stabilize our finances, expand our programs, and ensure that no child, family, or community is left behind.

Thank you for standing with us in the past. Let's work together to ensure the continued resilience and prosperity of our community for years to come.

Thank you.