



**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 Sharmarke Abdi, and I am 18 years old. I graduated from Briggs High School last year and now starting as a student at Columbus State Community College.

Sister Zerqa asked me to be here today, and I decided to come because I understand the importance of being present to speak up against the violence happening in my community. Where I come from, there is a lot of gun violence, and it's easy to get caught up doing the wrong things. I want to live to see another day, and my chances of that are a lot greater because of the support of MY Project USA and all it offers.

6 years ago, I found MY Project USA. I was introduced to this organization by a great friend of mine named Issa and my old coach. Issa and my old coach wanted me to join MY Project USA because of its importance in the community. MY Project USA helps kids stay out of the streets, they offer after school programs, a soccer program, a food pantry, leadership programs, and so much more. I participate in each of these programs, and it's saved my life. I decided to go to one soccer game, and before I knew it, I was falling in love with the sport, so I decided to play soccer and joined the team at MY Project USA. It has changed my life forever, and I've been introduced to a lot of good people. Because of Issa, I decided to give it all a try, and I'm thankful that I did.

Sadly, Issa is no longer with us today. On July 22, 2022, I lost my best friend.

Like any other ordinary day, we were outside playing soccer with everyone, and some gang bangers came in 6 cars and said they wanted to fight. We said no and tried to walk away. They trapped us and started shooting. We lost Issa.

He was a good kid with a very bright future in store for him, and that was taken away from him due to a senseless act of gun violence.

MY Project USA has made a difference in my life as a soccer player and student and now as a coach. I am currently assisting as a Coach for the Hilltop Tigers, and while leading, I want to live a long life, and I want our players, friends, and the people we love to live long lives.

With the State's support, we have turned the tides in the Wedgewood community and it's time to transform other neighborhoods like SouthPark, Havenwood and others on the westside. MY Project USA will continue giving kids a safe place to be and play sports instead of risking our lives out here in the streets. We have a lot of hope, and we can keep kids safe as much as possible from the violence and crime once and for all.

MY Project USA is a catalyst for that change, and I respectfully ask you to support our amendment.

I can take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you.

Shamarke Abdi

MY Project USA Soccer Coach