



Testimony

Stephanie Hightower, President & CEO
Columbus Urban League
Ohio House Finance Committee

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee, I am Stephanie Hightower, President and CEO of the Columbus Urban League. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am here to ask for your support for our request to invest in Ohio's greatest asset – our people. In brief, we seek \$750,000 over the biennium, for the **Columbus Urban League Workforce Initiative**, in order to connect 1,000 young people and adults to the high wage jobs of the future, through career exploration, internships, credentialing, training and placements – placements not only with large employers but also with at least 50 of the small businesses we serve in 18 counties around Central and Southeastern Ohio.

All of us can agree that Ohio's economic success lies, in part, in ensuring that more people acquire the skills and ability to meet our state's present and future workforce needs. With greater earning power, we reduce the need for public assistance, energize and accelerate business growth and help families leave the seemingly endless cycle of poverty in the rear-view mirror.

Three realities drive me to seek your support today.

First, it's about dollars and sense. The Columbus Urban League commissioned a study by Regionomics late last year. The study documented that, if we successfully equip more people to fully participate in our economy, we can lift 42,000 families out of poverty, add more than 153,000 more people to the workforce and grow Central Ohio's regional GDP by \$42 billion over the next decade.

Second, Ohio's people actively seek real opportunities. We surveyed more than 3500 clients of our own as well as similar organizations two years ago. The vast majority, who by the way are working heads of households, told us they would do what it takes to pursue jobs with benefits and a future, if we make it feasible for them to support their families while they retrain and upskill.

Finally, it's about business needs. It's been well documented that Ohio's employers depend upon our ability to offer a larger, well-trained workforce for us to fully realize the economic benefits of business expansion.

It's facts like these that caused our organization to double down on our mission of providing access and opportunity to everyone. We are laser focused on helping people create pathways to take high-wage jobs, developing and fostering young leaders who are career-explorers, cultivating and growing small businesses throughout the 18 urban, suburban and rural counties we serve, and teaching people the financial skills to buy homes, grow wealth and leave real legacies for their children and grandchildren.

The funds we seek in this request will advance that mission by specifically investing in our career and youth development initiatives. A portion of these dollars will pay the costs for certifications so that people enter health care, manufacturing, construction and other high-need workplaces after completed training critical to their daily work.

Your investment will help more people realize their full potential and strengthen Ohio's economy. Thank you for your consideration, and I welcome your questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steph Hightower". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steph" and last name "Hightower" clearly distinguishable.

Stephanie Hightower
President & CEO