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Jillian Lain

Regarding City Connects Pilot Program

March 12, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Jillian Lain, and I am the Director of City Connects Midwest from the Marian University Center for Vibrant Schools. I am here today to urge the Committee to fund a two-year, \$1 million pilot project to launch City Connects serving at least 10 K-12 schools in Ohio. As a part of this pilot project, schools will be committed to contributing a percentage of the up-front costs from their existing Student Wellness dollars and then providing ongoing support for the program once the state funding concludes.

City Connects was developed nearly 25 years ago by Boston College and has a proven record of success in driving positive student outcomes. City Connects improves student outcomes by more efficiently and effectively using existing school and community resources—many of which you and your colleagues support through the state budget each year across education, social services, health, and youth development line items.

Peer-reviewed studies show that City Connects in elementary schools leads to:

- Improved academic achievement
- Reduced chronic absenteeism
- Reduced high school dropout rates
- A greater likelihood that students who received City Connects in elementary school will enroll in and complete post-secondary programs

Due to these promising outcomes, in the Fall of 2008, City Connects launched in a Catholic elementary school in Dayton, Ohio. Over time, City Connects expanded and is currently implemented in three parochial Ohio schools across Dayton and Springfield. As a part of my role, I work collaboratively with Boston College to support the implementation of City Connects in these Ohio schools and have seen the impact firsthand.

What makes City Connects unique is that every child can benefit—not just the students in need of crisis intervention. Thus far in the 2024-25 school year, City Connects in Ohio served more than 743 students from early childhood through high school. A City Connects coordinator created and implemented individualized student support plans for 99% of students. These plans ensure students can receive appropriate support, including prevention and enrichment services like after-school programs, early intervention services like behavioral interventions, and intensive crisis intervention services like mental health services. In this same academic year, 8,871 services were delivered by more than 86 Ohio community partners, with 99% of students receiving three or more services. It is anticipated that the number of services and community

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partners will continue to increase over the remainder of the school year as services become more tailored and individualized.

Following the expansion in Ohio, in 2015 City Connects began implementation in Minneapolis, MN with the Twin Cities Catholic Schools. City Connects is currently being implemented in 10 schools in Minneapolis. In the 2023-24 school year, City Connects served 1,962 students, with 99% of students receiving an individualized student support plan. In that year, over 20,000 services were delivered with 96% of students receiving 3+ services.

Following the work in Minneapolis, in the 2021-22 academic year, Boston College partnered with the Marian University Center for Vibrant Schools to establish the City Connects Midwest Technical Assistance Center. The TA Center ensures students in the Midwest can benefit from one of the nation's most rigorously evaluated and effective approaches to student support. Since 2021, City Connects has been implemented in at least 60 schools in Indiana in the last 4 years through various city and state funding sources. The initial data is proving very promising, showing that schools that implemented City Connects from 2021-2023 saw an average of a 13% decrease in chronic absenteeism. These schools also showed statistically significant gains in Math and ELA scores for highest needs students (see attached report for more detail). Indiana has also been able to launch City Connects in the first rural district ever. This district has been able to provide tailored support to their students, serving 100% of their student population, averaging 7 services delivered per student per year. With the use of the City Connects data and the MyConnects system, the district will also be launching 12 new (targeted) after school clubs to meet the needs and interests of their students in the 2024-2025 school year.

In 2019 and again in 2021, thanks to your leadership and that of Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted, City Connects was one of several programs named an allowable use of Ohio Student Wellness and Success funds. Today, we are asking for \$1 million to directly fund a two-year pilot project that would specifically support the implementation of the City Connects in approximately 10 schools across the state of Ohio.

It takes a village to support students and families. With the coordinated efforts and proven track record of the City Connects framework, we are confident that expanding City Connects in Ohio will benefit students and their families for years to come, both academically and socially. I thank you for your time and consideration of this project, and we appreciate all that you are already doing for students in Ohio.



**Jillian Lain**  
Director, City Connects Midwest  
Center for Vibrant Schools  
Marian University

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