



**Interested Party Testimony- House Finance Committee
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget
March 13, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of House Finance Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 96 in support of the United Way Collaborative's funding request which would appropriate **\$2M per fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Program and Project Support line for the United Way Collaborative.**

I am Kerry Pedraza, Executive Director of United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties. Thank you Dr. Courtice and Tracey for joining me today to share the success of the United Way Collaborative.

As you may know, United Way is a national organization with affiliates around the country, dedicated to improving communities by addressing critical issues in education, financial stability, and health. In times of crisis, United Way mobilizes quickly to provide immediate support, and it partners with local organizations to find long-term solutions to issues like hunger, homelessness, and educational disparities. Ultimately, United Way serves as a bridge, connecting community needs with the resources necessary to address them, fostering lasting, positive change for all.

With funding from the state in the last biennium, United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties concentrated on new initiatives and the expansion of existing programs within our three counties to enhance early brain development and kindergarten readiness.

Research shows that children will be more successful when they reach kindergarten if preparation and attention has been given to children from the time they are born to the time they enter a formalized educational setting. For this reason, United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties invested our funding in scholarships to preschools when no other funding or resources were available. We worked directly with our schools to distribute pre-K Kindergarten Readiness enrichment packs to 650 children, providing them with resources and activities that support their learning and development at home. These packs include educational materials that help enhance their readiness for the classroom, ensuring that they are better prepared for the challenges ahead. By offering both programs, we equip children with the tools they need to start their educational journey with confidence and enthusiasm. A total of 120 students participated in our Kindergarten Readiness programs, where they received valuable preparation to help them transition smoothly into school. This program focuses on building foundational skills that are crucial for their success in kindergarten and beyond, such as early literacy and basic math skills.

Over 500 hours of mentorship, tutoring and enrichment activities were provided to children under the age of eight.

No child can thrive and be ready and excited to learn without a stable household. For this reason, over 5000 children received supplemental food assistance to help in their growth both physically and mentally. Because of the funding provided through this Collaborative, 50 households with 57 children under the age of 8, were provided rental assistance to prevent eviction from their homes.

The funding from the previous biennium has clearly resulted in impactful and positive outcomes. We are optimistic about receiving continued support, which will allow us to expand on this progress and continue driving meaningful change in our communities.

I kindly ask support for our funding request to expand implementation of the evidence-based Success By Third Grade Program and other related proven early childhood education initiatives, collaborate with schools, community organizations, and other entities to achieve a measurable impact on student achievement including implementing programs that focus on improved family stability.

Thank you,

Kerry Pedraza
Executive Director
United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties