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## **Ohio House Finance Committee Hearing**

Thursday, March 3

Interested Party Testimony

Ohio House Substitute Bill 96 – Make state operating appropriations for FY 2026-27

Carol Argiro

Director of Advancement

Huckleberry House

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony on House Substitute Bill 96, the state operating budget for FY 2026-27.

My name is Carol Argiro, and I serve as the Director of Advancement for Huckleberry House. Huckleberry House is a central Ohio nonprofit organization with the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness. Huckleberry House supports young people, ages 12 – 24, struggling with homelessness, family conflict, poverty, and violence. We provide a continuum of services that address the root issues of youth homelessness and help at-risk young people develop independent living skills to reach their full potential.

Huckleberry House is advocating for a budget allocation of \$729,000 (\$365,000 per biennium) – initially submitted to this committee as an amendment by Representative Jarrells – to support our crucial work. During a time of increased need and strained capacity, this funding would allow us to scale our Teen Crisis Program and Transitional Living Program operations to provide high-quality and high-return services to more youth across our state who are facing homelessness.

This budget investment would support the organization's tailored, one-on-one care with the youth we serve through our Teen Crisis Program and housing initiatives, and will provide a high return on investment for the State of Ohio. Based on national research, every \$1 invested in preventing and reducing youth homelessness can yield \$4 - \$7 in

long-term savings and economic benefits for the state of Ohio, affecting medical and behavioral health care systems, criminal and legal systems, and publicly funded wraparound services.

I joined the Huckleberry House team two years ago, and although I considered myself an informed citizen of this state, I was immediately struck by the data on youth homelessness:

- During the 2022-23 academic year, Ohio reported more than 24,000 students were experiencing homelessness
- For every night a young person is unhoused, there is a 2% likelihood that they will be unhoused again in their future.
- Young people who do not graduate from high school have a 3.5 times higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers who do graduate.
- Across the U.S., 1 in 5 homeless youth are victims of human trafficking; and 60% of child trafficking victims in the US have a history in the child welfare system.

Huckleberry House has been operating in central Ohio since 1970, preventing and ending the homelessness journey for thousands of young people in our state. Last year, Huckleberry House safely transitioned 92% of the youth in the teen crisis program and 91% of youth in the transitional living program to safe and stable housing. Your investment in Huckleberry House is an investment in the lives of the most vulnerable members of our community – our young people - AND is an investment in Ohio's workforce, Ohio's economy, and in the well-being of our communities.

As this Committee continues deliberations on the budget bill, we respectfully urge you to include our funding amendment for Huckleberry House. The state's investing in our organization will make a lasting impact on the lives of Ohio's youth and families, supporting our ability to scale operations of our Teen Crisis Program, which provides lifesaving support and transformative opportunities for youth in Ohio who are facing challenging circumstances, including homelessness.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.  
Carol Argiro