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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

Kyra Crockett Hodge
Director of Community Outreach and Engagement
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 Kyra Crockett Hodge, and I serve as the Director of Outreach and Engagement for Huckleberry House, a central Ohio nonprofit organization supporting young people ages 12 - 24 struggling with homelessness, family conflict, poverty, and violence. We provide a continuum of services, including operating a Teen Crisis and Transitional Living Program 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 will support the organization's tailored, one-on-one care with the youth we serve through our Teen Crisis and Transitional Living Programs, and it will provide a high return on investment for our state. Research demonstrates that investment in homelessness prevention

programs reduces government spending across medical and behavioral health care systems, criminal and legal systems, and publicly funded wraparound services.

Young people need our community more than ever to stand in the gaps for the plethora of challenges that are affecting their lives daily. They are hurting, they do not trust and they are choosing or being forced to try to figure things out on their own. Huckleberry House is invested in being a long-term solution to change the narrative of these young people's lives, which requires a vision beyond just providing somewhere for them to go. Huckleberry House has been standing in the gap for 55 years, but due to trauma, mental health, poverty, lack of education and resources, we are witnessing the gaps getting bigger and harder to fill. Huckleberry House has both the expertise and imagination to cultivate something different for young people struggling to thrive in the state of Ohio. This work is hard yet necessary. Young people are counting on us, and we are counting on you.

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.

Kyra Crockett Hodge