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Ohio House Finance Committee Hearing

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Interested Party Testimony

Ohio House Substitute Bill 96 – Make State Operating Appropriations for FY 2026 – 2027

Deborah Lisheid

Board of Directors Member

Huckleberry House

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and distinguished members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony on House Substitute Bill 96, the state operating budget for fiscal year 2026 – 2027.

My name is Deborah Lisheid, and I serve as a volunteer member of the Board of Directors for Huckleberry House. Huckleberry House is our (yours and my) Central Ohio nonprofit organization that supports young people ages 12-24 who struggle and suffer from homelessness, family conflict, poverty and violence. I struggle and shudder – I actually get chills - using the words homelessness, family conflict, poverty and violence. I experienced family conflict and violence in my home; but it wasn't dealt with – we were an upper middle-class family in Upper Arlington forcing a pretentious picture of health, piety and virtue. I wonder if any of you experienced such a fake front.

Since 1970 Huckleberry House has provided the tools and resources, including a Teen Crisis Program, to help our young people identify and address the root causes of their situation – there isn't one thing common in these root causes – they are as varied as our fingerprints. This program helps our at-risk young people develop independent living skills to move them toward their potential.

Huckleberry House is advocating for a budget allocation of \$729,000.00, which is \$365,000.00 per biennium, initially submitted as an amendment by Representative Jarrells to support our work.

During this time of increased need and strained capabilities, this funding would allow us to build on the successes experienced in our Teen Crisis Shelter and Transitional Living Program to date. 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 wrap-around services.

15 months ago I was granted and have been living under the protection of a civil domestic protective order as the result of felonies against me by a man who started in the system as a 14 year old at what was then known as Buckeye Boys Ranch and is now Buckeye Ranch. In June of last year, he received the maximum sentence and is serving it in Circleville Correctional Facility. Prison. We failed him, everyone of us, and he took it out on me – the girl from the pretentious family in Upper Arlington.

As you deliberate on the budget bill, we respectfully urge you to include the requested funding amendment for Huckleberry House. Investing in our efforts will continue the 55 year legacy of positive and lasting impact on the lives of Ohio youth who knock on our door. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer questions.

Deborah Lisheid