



**HB 96 (Stewart) Interested Party Testimony**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**May 14, 2025**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Minority Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Thom Olmstead, VP of Government Affairs for the Sisters of Charity Health System in Cleveland Ohio. For those of you who may not be familiar with our extensive history, the Sisters of Charity Health System was established in 1982 as the parent corporation for the sponsored ministries of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine in Ohio and South Carolina. Since its founding in 1851, the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, have continued a faith-based legacy of high-quality, compassionate care to improve the lives of the marginalized and underserved in Cleveland and greater Northeast Ohio

Today the System oversees St. Vincent Charity Community Health Center in Cleveland, Ohio. The health center is a faith-based, high-quality outpatient health care provider offering services in primary care, mental health care, addiction medicine and a number of social service programs that address social drivers of health. We also provide residential eldercare services at Regina Health Center in Richfield, Ohio, and Light of Hearts Villa in Bedford, Ohio. Other health and human services and education-related organizations within the Sisters of Charity Health System include the; the Early Childhood Resource Center for the healthy development of children and high-quality early childhood education and care in Canton, Ohio; Joseph & Mary's Home in Cleveland, which serves as the only homeless service provider in Northeast Ohio exclusively focused on medical respite care for men and women; Healthy Learners, a health care resource for children from low-income families in South Carolina; and the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, which works to reduce barriers and strengthens relationships between fathers and families throughout South Carolina; as well as grant-making foundations in Ohio and South Carolina focused on reducing poverty, working to end homelessness, and improving educational and health outcomes in underserved communities.

Today, I am here to respectfully request support for a pilot project with Marion Sterling Elementary School located in Cleveland's Central neighborhood, which is the poorest neighborhood in Cuyahoga County, and one of the poorest neighborhoods in Ohio. Our campus is located within Central, and over the decades we have partnered with the other community members and residents to provide services and funding in the community in an effort to improve the plight and future of the residents we serve. As we considered additional unmet needs within Central, which are extensive, we chose one of the elementary schools in the neighborhood to pilot a proven and evidence-based model designed to help decrease absenteeism and increase test scores of the students. The earmark we are requesting is \$375,000 per SFY 25 and 26.

### Central Neighborhood Demographics

- Mean household income less than \$20,000.
- Highest poverty rate in Cleveland: 71.5%
- 81.5% of children aged 0–17 live in poverty
- Fifty percent (50%) of working-age residents were employed in the last 12 months
- The total population in the Central Neighborhood is approximately 12,887.

### K-8 Education: One pillar of the new model

1. Implementing a *place-based, whole-family* approach to remove social drivers/barriers, increase student engagement, boost academic outcomes, increase positive parenting education, and improve access to opportunities for children and families of the Marion-Sterling elementary school. Marion Sterling is part of the Cleveland Public School System serving 243 Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

2. Build educational and social foundations to strengthen family lives and achieve significant academic gains for the children

#### Program Goals:

- Reduce absenteeism
  - Chronic absenteeism at Marion Sterling has averaged over 42% since 2018, and 54% in 2023 and 2024
- Improve academic proficiencies
  - Three percent (3%) of students at Marion Sterling scored at or above the third grade proficient level for math
  - Seventeen percent (17%) of students at Marion Sterling scored at or above the third grade proficient level for reading

- Long term goal: lifting multiple generations out of poverty
3. Single School Focus: Impact and outcomes driven data gathering and analysis are at the core of the program. Concentrating efforts on just one school will enable us to isolate and more accurately measure the impact and outcomes of specific services and programs. Additionally, resources can be deployed more efficiently, time constraints reduced and implementation costs lowered. The intention is to scale the program.
  4. Precedent: The Marion-Sterling Initiative will in-part model a program recently implemented at Gibbs Elementary School in Canton, Ohio. Not unlike Marion-Sterling, Gibbs Elementary is in the poorest neighborhood in Canton. Three years following implementation of the Gibbs program, there has been a twenty two percent (22%) increase in third graders reading on-or above level. Chronic Absenteeism has decreased by 28% since 2022. Our intent is to emulate and enhance this comprehensive program and build a long-term model of *cradle to career* supports for children and residents of the Central Neighborhood.
  5. Partnering: Collaborating with existing partners and service providers, the Pilot will connect the learning experiences of students and teachers in the classroom with family and community support systems in and outside of the walls of the school. Examples of the programs and resources to be provided are:

Core Component	Description
Community Health Worker in the School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community resource connector with lived experience that supports families' needs related to the social drivers of health</li> </ul>

<b>Early Childhood Home Visiting – Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One-time sessions for kids/parents designed to show the importance of early childhood education and to enroll 3 and 4-year old siblings in home visiting program</li> <li>▪ Incorporate the Imagination Library in support of kindergarten readiness</li> </ul>
<b>In-School and Out-of-School-Time Literacy Support and Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Secure an evidenced-based curriculum to help with ongoing literacy needs for k-3 students.</li> </ul>
<b>Emergency Rent/Utility Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emergency Assistance fund for rental assistance, eviction prevention, utility shut off notices, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>After School Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sports and Physical Activities</li> <li>▪ Arts and Crafts</li> <li>▪ STEM Activities</li> <li>▪ Academic Enrichment</li> </ul>
<b>Food Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Weekend worth of meals suitable for children</li> </ul>
<b>Parent Engagement Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent café to build relationships among parents and school staff</li> </ul>
<b>Transportation Assistance Fund</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lyft rides, car repairs, car payments, bus passes, gas cards for essential transportation needs</li> </ul>
<b>Triple P Parenting Program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Positive-parenting education and support around child development and parenting strategies</li> </ul>

Thank you for the opportunity to share this project with you. We would greatly appreciate your support. I am available to answer any questions at this time.