

Ohio Senate Finance Committee

**Interested Party Testimony of
Ohio Council of YWCAs**

HB 96 – FY 26/27 State Operating Budget

May 27, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Elizabeth Brown, and I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Columbus. I am also a proud member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, which includes 13 YWCA chapters serving communities across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 96. In the Governor's introduced version of the budget, the Ohio Council of YWCAs was allocated \$1.5 million per fiscal year. However, the House-passed version made broad reductions to the TANF Block Grant, which cut our funding in half – to \$750,000 annually. Today, I respectfully urge this committee to restore the full \$1.5 million per year, as originally proposed.

This funding directly supports programming that provides critical, often life-saving services to women, children, and families who have experienced gender-based violence. It also sustains and expands our youth development and prevention initiatives in communities across Ohio. Specifically, the funding supports Council programs that:

- Provide emergency shelter to families and women in housing crisis,
- Ensure crisis support for victims of domestic violence;
- Deliver trauma-informed services for survivors, including counseling, case management, and substance abuse treatment;
- Offer outreach and education to prevent violence before it begins, particularly among youth.

YWCA programs don't just meet short-term needs—we offer wraparound services designed to promote long-term stability and well-being. These services are outcome-driven and community-rooted. Last year alone, Ohio YWCA chapters reached more than 90,000 women, children, and family members. In partnership with over 45 school districts and alternative schools statewide, we deliver after-school care, violence prevention education, and youth programming that changes lives.

YWCA Columbus has been dedicated to housing and supporting women in need since its founding in 1886, serving the Greater Columbus Metro area in Franklin County. Our services encompass housing for vulnerable families in our Family Center, permanent supportive housing for women with disabilities in the Women's Residency Program, and child enrichment programs offered in shelters and afterschool programs across multiple locations, including Westerville, Gahanna, KIPP Columbus, and the United Schools Network. All programs are recognized with Step Up to Quality awards.

Our comprehensive curriculum integrates choice-based learning, entrepreneurship, STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), social-emotional development, and physical fitness. Additionally, we provide a trauma-informed curriculum in our early childhood education center within the Family Center, along with trauma-informed programming and counseling in both the Center and our permanent supportive housing facility.

Your investment has already produced real results. In the last biennium, with state support, YWCA Columbus:

- Provided **66,933 meals** to families at the YWCA Family Center, ensuring youth and families experiencing food insecurity had access to nutritious meals.
- A total of **275 families** facing challenges in accessing childcare and maintaining workforce participation received assistance.
- **177 women** impacted by domestic violence and abuse received vital support services.

The need is urgent and growing. In 2023, Ohio reported **36,111 incidents of domestic violence**. Meanwhile, **1 in 5 children in Ohio face hunger**, and **4 in 10 working parents** have had to miss work due to lack of childcare. These numbers reflect the reality we see on the ground every day—and they underscore why this funding is so critical.

While we are grateful for the House’s continued investment of \$750,000 per year, restoring the Governor’s proposed \$1.5 million will allow us to reach significantly more individuals and expand our impact across the state.

Ohio’s YWCAs do far more than respond to crises. We are leaders in preventing gender violence, combating human trafficking, promoting economic stability, and empowering youth and women to lead healthy, self-sufficient lives. This investment would amplify those efforts at a time when communities need them most.

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee—thank you for your time, also a special thanks to all of you and your staff for meeting with our YWCA members during our advocacy day on May 7, and for your continued commitment to strengthening Ohio’s families and communities.