

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

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

My name is Rickell Howard Smith, Esq. and I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Greater Cincinnati. I am also a proud member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, which includes 13 YWCA chapters serving communities across the state.

I am providing 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 collective funding in half – to \$750,000 annually across 13 organizations. Today, I request this committee to restore the full \$1.5 million per year, as originally proposed.

This funding directly supports programming that provides critical and emergency support and wrap around services to families fleeing violence, seeking emergency shelter. It also sustains our youth development and prevention initiatives in Adams, Brown, Clermont, and Hamilton counties. YWCA Greater Cincinnati operates the only emergency shelter for families fleeing domestic violence across these 4 counties. Specifically, this funding supports programs that:

- Provide emergency shelter to families in housing crisis;
- Deliver health-centered wrap around support for children and families, including food, clothing, counseling and case management;
- Youth outreach and education to prevent violence before it begins.

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.

In 2024, we continued to see a significant increase in the demand for our services in Greater Cincinnati, Clermont, Brown and Adams county, particularly in our emergency shelter, housing and supportive programs, and youth-centered violence prevention training. Last year alone, YWCA Greater Cincinnati reached more than 12,686 across all programs and services.



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

- Over **65,115 meals** were served to youth and families facing food insecurity (of which 45% were children);
- Staff was supported in order to respond to a 20% increase from 2023, in crisis calls through the emergency hotline;
- **754 shelter survivors** impacted by domestic violence and abuse received vital support services, including food, clothing, counseling and case management.

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, we recognize the changing costs and evolving needs of the families within our community. 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 domestic violence, combating human trafficking, promoting economic stability, and empowering youth and families to lead abundant and thriving lives. This investment would enhance and sustain those efforts at a critical time for communities.

To Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee—thank you for your time in reviewing this testimony, 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.

Sincerely,



Rickell Howard Smith
President & CEO



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