

Ohio Senate Finance Committee

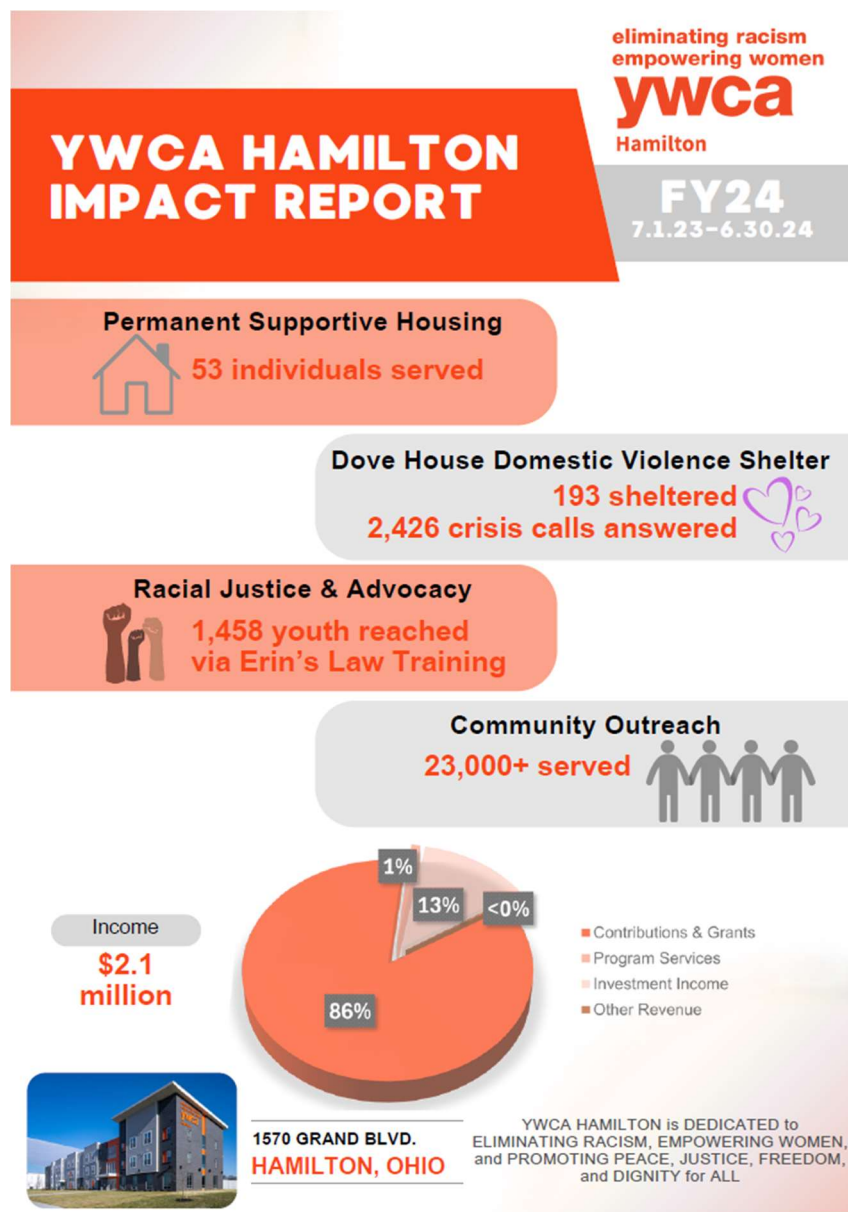
Interested Party Testimony of Ohio Council of YWCAs

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 Wendy Waters-Connell, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Hamilton in Butler County. I am also a proud member of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, serving the state with 13 chapters. YWCA Hamilton operates one of the lowest barrier domestic violence emergency shelters in the state and the only one in Butler County. Our shelter accepts pets who are also fleeing with survivors and their dependent children. We offer school-based youth programming designed to prevent sexual abuse and promote healthy relationships to prevent domestic violence in the future. Butler County has one of the highest incidences of domestic violence in the state. Our goals include preventing abuse and saving lives. Below is a summary of our impact in fiscal year 2024.



Today, I'm offering written 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. I respectfully and humbly 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 survivors, children, and families who have experienced domestic violence. It also sustains and expands our youth development and sexual abuse prevention initiatives in our county and across Ohio. Specifically, the funding supports Council programs that:

- Provide emergency shelter and crisis support for survivors, their dependent children and pets fleeing of domestic violence;
- Deliver trauma-informed services for survivors, including counseling, case management, and post shelter housing support.
- Offer outreach and education to prevent sexual abuse of children, and to promote healthy relationships that will prevent domestic violence before it begins, particularly among youth.

YWCA Hamilton programs are evidence based and are designed to strengthen families. 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.

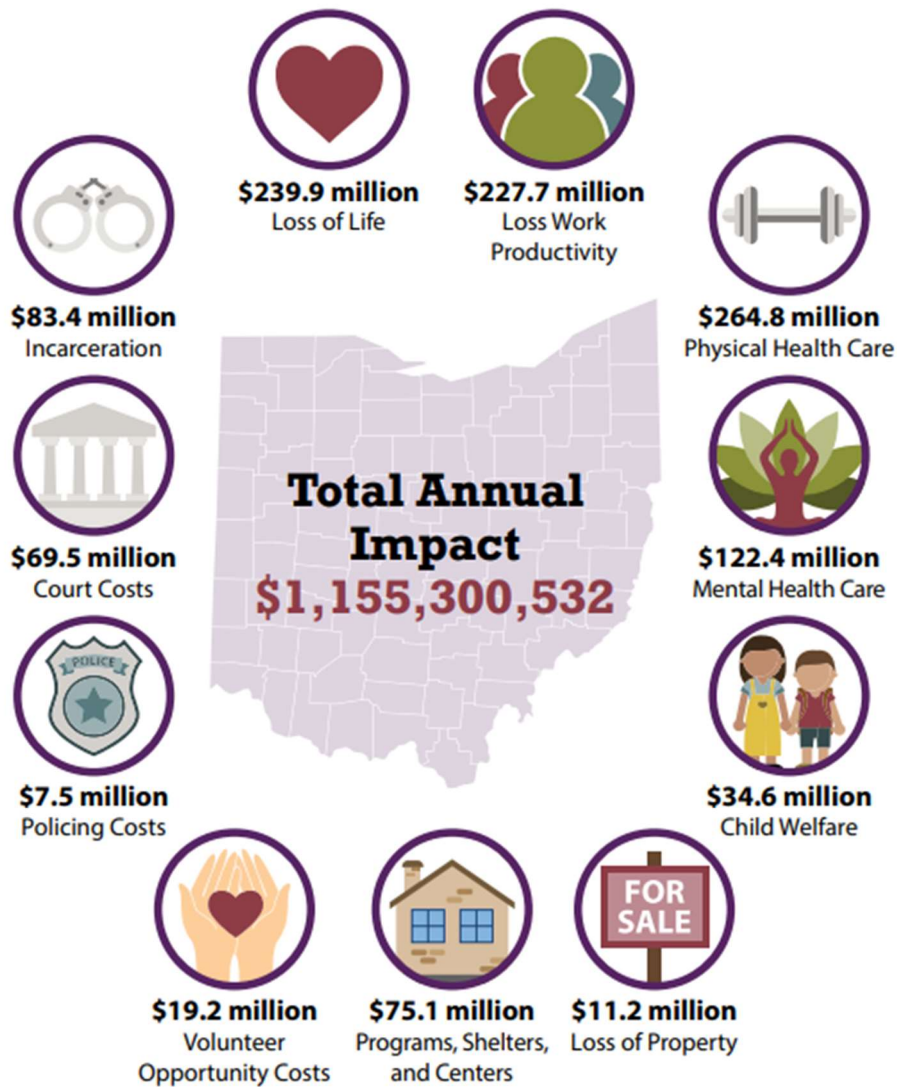
Your investment has already produced real results. In the last biennium, with state support:

- Over **304,000 meals** were served to youth and families facing food insecurity;
- Approximately **677 parents and families** received childcare assistance that allowed them to remain in the workforce;
- Nearly **10,600 individuals** 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.

YWCA Hamilton is also a part of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. Last year, ODVN commissioned a formal study of the economic impact of DV in Ohio. It is more than a billion dollars a year!

The Many Economic Factors Of Intimate Partner Violence in Ohio



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. This investment is far less than the costs of domestic violence and sexual abuse in our communities.

Ohio's YWCAs do far more than respond to crises. We are leaders in preventing abuse and domestic violence, combating human trafficking, promoting economic stability, and empowering youth and survivors 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.