

Written Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Subject: Support for Budget Amendment Granting Franklin County Permissive Authority to Implement a Ride Share Fee (SC0354)

Submitted by: Rachel Lustig, President & CEO, Lutheran Social Services

On Behalf of: Franklin County Shelter Providers Network

Date: 5/23/2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of a budget amendment that would authorize Franklin County to implement a local ride share fee to support the region's emergency shelter system and homelessness and domestic violence services.

Franklin County is facing a rapidly escalating homelessness crisis. Between 2022 and 2024, homelessness increased by 24%, with unsheltered homelessness projected to grow an additional 68% by 2028. The root of this crisis is our region's affordable housing shortage, but the consequences are felt daily in overwhelmed shelters and an increasing number of families and individuals with nowhere to turn.

The Shelter Providers Network in Franklin County operates nearly 1,400 emergency shelter beds, with an additional 300 overflow beds used during extreme weather or crisis. In 2023 alone, these shelters served more than 9,500 people, using nationally recognized, trauma-informed practices to move individuals into permanent housing and provide safe shelter, food, childcare, and case management.

Despite this expertise and impact, the emergency shelter system faces a critical funding shortfall. Historically underfunded by federal sources, emergency shelter operations in Franklin County have relied on a fragile mix of local general revenue funds and private philanthropy. This model is no longer sustainable.

The temporary infusion of federal relief through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided a lifeline that will end on June 30, 2025. Without new local revenue, the Community Shelter Board projects a \$23.5 million gap in funding needed to maintain current shelter capacity and operations. Of that, over \$15 million remains without a defined funding source.

The consequences of inaction are severe: hundreds of beds would close, families would be left unsheltered, and domestic violence survivors would face life-threatening conditions. Further, the erosion of shelter infrastructure would negatively impact Central

Ohio's ability to secure federal housing funds, creating ripple effects throughout the housing continuum.

This is why the proposed budget amendment, SC0354, is both urgent and essential.

Granting Franklin County permissive authority to implement a ride share fee offers a practical, equitable solution. It would empower local leaders to create a dedicated funding stream that is not dependent on existing local general revenue funds. Similar models have been implemented in other cities to fund transportation and housing needs, and Franklin County should be allowed the same flexibility to address its most urgent local challenge.

This measure does not appropriate new state dollars; it simply enables local problem-solving. It aligns with Ohio's tradition of local control, allowing counties to respond to the needs of their residents using tools tailored to their circumstances.

Franklin County has the infrastructure, the provider expertise, and the community partnerships to manage an effective, outcomes-driven shelter system. What is needed now is a stable funding foundation. This budget amendment will help provide that.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued commitment to Ohio's communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Lustig

President & CEO

Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio