



**Written Testimony for the
Senate Committee on Finance**
May 23, 2025

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Good morning Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Committee on Finance. I am Carrie Dotson, Executive Director of Lifeline, Inc., Lake and Geauga Counties' Community Action Agency. I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Am. Sub. H.B. 96 and to provide a suggestion for an amendment to the legislation.

Lifeline is a Community Action Agency that serves both Lake and Geauga Counties in northeast Ohio, a combined population of 327,047 residents. We employ approximately 30 employees between our two county offices. We operate over 20 programs including those that provide assistance with transportation, housing, utilities, education and job training, counseling and case management and senior services. Specific examples of these include utility programs that keep local residents warm during the cold northeast Ohio winters like the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), financial literacy and asset building programs to help educate people to lift themselves out of poverty and improve their own circumstances, reentry services for those reintegrating into our communities, and programs that provide safe and affordable housing options. Each year Lifeline assists over 3,000 Lake and Geauga County households with critical services meant to promote self-sufficiency and improve the quality of life for our entire community.

The amendment we hope will be included with Am. Sub. H.B. 96 will allow Community Action Agencies like ours to work in partnership with automobile dealers and ASE certified car repair businesses to offer repair services to our customers.

This language was included in the budget as introduced by Governor DeWine but deleted by the House. The reason it was deleted was because it was thought that this was not in line with the intentions of the TANF funding.

However, the budget proposal of the Trump Administration was revealed shortly after the action of the Ohio House. The language in the Trump Budget says that states are to use at least 30% of TANF funds for "work supports". Included in the list of "work supports" is



“transportation assistance”. Repairing a car so people can get to their job so they can keep it or attain a job is definitely “transportation assistance.”

The amendment that we hope you will support has been submitted by Senator Wilkin and an identical amendment was submitted by Senator DeMora. It would appropriate up to \$2 million per year of the biennium for car repairs. It is supported by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, as they had it in their budget as introduced.

We request this because the majority of our customers, while low-income, are employed or seeking employment and transportation is necessary for most employment. Car repairs can be costly, and with the complexity of modern vehicles, they are often beyond the means of many low-income people. As you know, a good job can be a great way out of poverty. A working, safe and reliable vehicle is essential for getting to and from work in suburban and rural communities like we have in Lake and Geauga Counties.

Lifeline has been pleased to be part of a pilot program, along with 11 other Community Action Agencies in Ohio for the past year. Our program is intended for Lake and Geauga residents who find transportation as a barrier to finding or maintaining employment. With a modest budget of \$90,596, Lifeline has been able to assist 30 residents with car repairs, allowing them to either find or keep their employment because they were able to have their car repaired and maintain reliable transportation. This is good for our clients, as well as for their employers. Among our successes are clients like Raymond, Brian and Deidre.

Raymond was a railroad labor union worker and father of three. In January Raymond’s life was turned upside down when his wife went into addiction treatment leaving him to care for their children alone. The extra cold winter this year left him facing very few hours available at work, eventually leading to him being temporarily unemployed. When his pickup started having problems it only compounded his troubles. Thanks to Lifeline’s car repair program he was able to get his vehicle running safely. This allowed Raymond to safely transport his children and to get out to seek employment. He was able to secure employment as a result of his having reliable transportation.

Brian had a background in film, performing as a stunt person and working in digital media. When Brian broke his wrist and ended up needing multiple surgeries it left him unable to continue doing the work he had always loved. Even though he began seeking other employment, being out of work eventually led to Brian losing his home. For Brian his car is so much more than just a car, it is also has become his home. Brian used the car repair program to repair things that were safety concerns. He replaced his bald tires, had shorted out wires repaired, and fixed a faulty airbag. Brian was overly grateful for the assistance he was able to receive and credits the program with allowing him to safely get through the winter and go out and find new work.

Deidre is a single mother of three. At the time in which she used the program she was working full time as a caregiver and attending STNA classes. Her brakes on her vehicle were completely

worn out, making it hazardous to drive and her tires were bald. Deidre was able to get her vehicle repaired at a local mechanic. She says that the program made it possible for her to continue getting to work and attend her STNA classes. Deidre has since completed her STNA certification and secured better employment as a result.

We ran out of funding for the program three months ahead of the end of the program year, so we know with additional funds we could have assisted an additional 5-10 participants, local residents like Raymond, Brian and Deidre who just need a little extra support to find or maintain their employment. Please keep in mind that we do not advertise this program because of limited funding—referrals come directly from our local One Stop office and from within our other agency programs. If we were to actually promote the program, I think we could reasonably expect to assist up to 100 or more participants each year between Lake and Geauga Counties.

In addition to the work supports that this program provides, it is also beneficial for local economic development. We work exclusively with local mechanics on these car repairs, so all funding invested is staying local, here in Lake and Geauga Counties, which also helps our small businesses to thrive and keeps their workforce employed.

Our state association, OACAA, is requesting \$2 million per year for each year of the biennium to fund local programs like ours through its training arm, the Ohio Community Action Training Organization. They suggest that this be funded with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families grant as Ohio historically has not spent all of this grant. They have discussed this with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and they support this program and this request.

I am happy to answer your questions about Lifeline's programs and our successes with it.



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