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Good morning, Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Helen Forbes Fields. I am the President and CEO of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland. For over 150 years, the YWCA of Greater Cleveland has been serving women and families in Northeast Ohio. We seek to provide, protect and empower transformational change for homeless youth, and young adults, homeless women and homeless families with children ages three to five.

Founded in 1868 the Young Women's Christian Association of Cleveland is one of the oldest nonprofit organizations in Cleveland. Today the YWCA Greater Cleveland serves over 200 women per night in emergency shelter, provides permanent supportive housing to over 20 young adults, primarily aged out foster care, as well as more than 40 older adults, and we operate Cleveland's first trauma-informed, two-generational early learning center.

I testify before you today in support of the YWCA Cleveland earmark request for \$200,000 per fiscal year to rebuild capacity of the Early Learning Center preschool program for 50 children to become fully ready for school, emotionally, socially, and academically, reducing the risk of kindergarten expulsion. This would restore \$200,000 lost in TANF cuts last year.

Our work with individuals experiencing homelessness includes operating the largest low-barrier shelter for women in Cuyahoga County, the first of its kind housing and supportive services facility in Cuyahoga County for homeless youth and young adults, and operating the only trauma-informed preschool for homeless families in the region, if not the state, which will be the focus of my comments this morning.

Each year, nearly 80 percent of children entering the ELC are experiencing homelessness, living in shelter with a parent. Families experiencing trauma need an intentional level of support for their social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth in order to end family homelessness and change the odds for the children as trauma is highly correlated to future negative outcomes.

YWCA's ELC preschool is a two-generational model, serving parents and their children. All children are assessed by an early childhood mental health consultant to identify their

unique needs, while parents receive individualized housing and employment support. The consultant works collaboratively with our fully-degreed teaching staff and family engagement case managers to collaborate toward the family's self-sufficiency and success.

In addition to its trauma-informed educational approach, the YWCA of Greater Cleveland provides additional wrap around services to support the whole family. The center works to build resiliency in young children who have experienced trauma, ensure they are kindergarten ready, and reduce the risk of kindergarten expulsion. For these homeless families, the YWCA works hard to find them permanent housing, transportation and employment support and other benefits. We use the evidence-based Strengthening Families approach and have a high level of parent engagement at the preschool. We know it works.

The community impact the ELC preschool provides is tangible as the average time of enrollment for a child is 20-24 months, and by the time the child graduates into kindergarten, 94% of families have found homes and the majority of parents have found employment. Of the children enrolled, 100% have experienced between 1-10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as witnessing domestic violence, neglect, exposure to substance abuse, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and other significant household dysfunction. This program provides much more than just pre-school education for homeless children, but also a path to a more stable life for their families.

We are proud of the progress and success of the families we serve through the Early Learning Center. With your continued support, we will be able to continue serving some of Ohio's most vulnerable children and families and help them on their journey toward brighter futures.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of this request.