

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony from United Way of Greater Cincinnati on House Bill 96
Submitted May 23, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and other distinguished members of the Ohio Senate, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 96.

My name is Hailey Barr-King, and I am the Senior Manager of Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Greater Cincinnati. For over a century, United Way has been ensuring community members have access to basic needs. We are grateful for Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly's commitment to allocating state and federal funds to helping Ohioans, including investments in education, housing, and economic stability programs, all helping make Ohio the best place in the country to live, work, and raise a family.

As the Governor and legislature continue to deliberate on House Bill 96 we ask that you fund the following six recommendations. These priorities directly support our neighbors across the state making life more affordable for working families across Ohio and growing workforce participation.

1. Reinstate the Governor's recommendation of a \$1,000 Refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC).

In a recent study by Groundwork Ohio, more than a third (34%) of parents with young children struggle to pay rent or their mortgage and nearly half (47%) are struggling with credit card debt. Working parents in Ohio are facing hard choices nearly every day due to mounting financial challenges. That's why policies like the refundable CTC are essential not just to alleviate financial pressure, but to ensure all families across the state can achieve economic prosperity and stability. The CTC amendment number is SC0572.

2. Restore the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

The KRA is Ohio's only statewide, child level tool that measures how prepared every kindergartner is across four domains: social emotional development, language and literacy, mathematics, and physical wellbeing. Groundwork Ohio found that nearly 4 out of 5 low-income children are not demonstrating kindergarten readiness. Eliminating the KRA will make it harder to identify learning gaps. This is an investment to support children at a pivotal moment in their educational journey. The KRA amendment number is SC0456.

3. Allocate \$2 million in each fiscal year to Ohio 211 to ensure all Ohioans have access to information and referral services.

Ohio 211 has been serving Ohioans for nearly 25 years. This service lives in the same ecosystem as 911 and 988 with 911 being used for emergency services and 988 handling mental health services. 211 is the number to call for other needs, such as housing, utility

assistance, child care, transportation, and other vital services in our communities. As of today, Ohio 211 lacks the revenue needed to cover all 88 counties in the state. In fact, people in 30 counties can't access 211 resources. Ohio's 211 system does not currently receive state funds. Instead, the 14 affiliates operate through a combination of local and philanthropic funding. An investment from the State would allow Ohio 211 to expand service in areas that currently lack coverage. Ohio is one of only a few states that does not have full 211 state coverage. The Ohio 211 amendment number is SC1796.

4. Reinstate the Governor's recommendation of \$2 million in each fiscal year to the Siemer Family Institute.

The Siemer Family Institute's Family Stability Programs were first funded with TANF dollars in HB 166 of the 133rd General Assembly, where it received \$1 million dollars per fiscal year with the requirement that all publicly funded dollars are matched dollar for dollar with private donations. With state support through TANF dollars, over the last six years the Family Stability Programs have been able to serve 13,086 Ohio families and 33,202 Ohio children. The matching funds requirement more than doubled the state's investment, resulting in nearly \$16 million of public and private funding. The Governor did not include the private matching funds requirement in his recommended budget this year, but the Siemer Institute testified before the House Children and Human Services Committee in support of reinstating the requirement. Ultimately, the House decided to reduce the earmark to \$1 million per fiscal year. Returning funding and not including the private funding match will drastically reduce the number of families and children the Siemer Institute and its partner United Ways are able to serve.

5. Allocate \$200,00 per fiscal year to Clermont and Brown County Project LIFT.

Project LIFT is a public/private partnership that helps families remove barriers to securing sustainable income and achieving financial stability through critical short-term assistance and support, coaching, workforce development, and other resources. Beyond the flexible financial assistance, Project LIFT assists participants with resource navigation, employment, and a more thorough network of Sponsor Agencies and strategic partners. In the last budget cycle, Project LIFT received \$250,000 per fiscal year and was matched 1:1 with private donations from United Way of Greater Cincinnati's supporters. The Project LIFT amendment number is SC1414.

6. Restore the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) and launch a study committee to recommend improvements.

The OHTF is the primary source of state funding for local homelessness, emergency home repair, and affordable housing programs. The House inserted an amendment into HB 96 that would forfeit state oversight of the OHTF, creating more bureaucracy and inefficiency at the county level. Overhauling the OHTF is a drastic change that will lead to less affordable housing and increased homelessness. Instead of the House's amendment, the Senate should set up a study committee to thoroughly evaluate the OHTF and recommend improvements.

Thank you for considering these budget recommendations that improve the quality of life, for all Ohio families.

Contact for Follow Up:

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