

Testimony in Support of Amendment Sub. H.B. No.96

Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Funding request for Murtis Taylor Human Services System – Myers Manor Transitional Living Facility for Homeless Women with Children

Presented by: Bob Ivory, Executive Director Ophelia Myers Manor & Students of Promise Leadership Academy

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Opening Statement

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and distinguished members of The Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Amendment Sub. H.B. No.96, which would allocate \$110,135 in fiscal year 2026 and \$142, 117 in fiscal year 2026 to the Murtis Taylor Human Services System for the establishment and operation of the Ophelia Myers Manor Transitional Living Facility for Homeless Women with Children.

My name is Bob Ivory, Executive Director of Ophelia Myers Manor and the Students of Promise Leadership Academy. Today, I stand before you to advocate for some of our most vulnerable citizens, women, and their children in Cuyahoga County. I am here to request your support for a transformative project that addresses not just the symptoms of homelessness but seeks to break its cycle through comprehensive, trauma-informed care, education, and a pathway to self-sufficiency.

The homeless crisis in Cuyahoga County has reached alarming proportions, with a particularly devastating impact on women and children. Recent data from the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless indicates that families with children represent nearly 40% of the homeless population in Cuyahoga County, with women-headed households accounting for the vast majority of these families (Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless, Annual Homeless Census, 2024). On any given night in Cuyahoga County, approximately 1,800 individuals experience homelessness, with over 600 of them being children under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Point-in-Time Count, 2024).

These numbers represent more than just statistics – they represent children who struggle to maintain consistent school attendance, who lack privacy and an environment conducive to studying test preparation, and homework, who miss medical appointments, and who experience chronic stress and trauma that impair their cognitive development and emotional well-being. They represent mothers who, despite their best efforts, find themselves unable to provide stable housing for their children due to economic hardships, domestic violence, mental health challenges, or other systemic barriers.

In the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District specifically, school administrators report that 167 children are currently identified as homeless, impacting 97 families. Over 240 students were identified as homeless during the 2023-2024 academic school year (McKinney-Vento Annual Report, 2024). These students were found to be:

- Three times more likely to be absent from school (Ohio Department of Education, Attendance Records Analysis, 2024)
- Four times more likely to drop out before graduation (Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District, Student Outcomes Report, 2024)

- 87% more likely to experience developmental delays (American Academy of Pediatrics, “Housing Insecurity and Child Development,” 2023)
- Significantly more likely to experience depression and anxiety (Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, “Mental Health Outcomes of Homeless Youth,” 2024)

The economic impact of youth homelessness extends far beyond the immediate cost of emergency services. Research indicates that each homeless youth costs society approximately \$248,000 over their lifetime in lost productivity, increased use of public services, criminal justice expenses, and healthcare costs (Chaplin Hall at the University of Chicago, “The economic Burden of Youth Homelessness,” 2023). Investing in preventative and supportive services can significantly reduce these long-term societal costs.

The Ophelia Myers Manor project represents a comprehensive, community-based solution to this crisis. Located at 2475 Taylor Road in Cleveland Heights (District 18), on a 5.2-acre campus, this facility will provide transitional housing and wraparound services for up to 6 families or 30 individuals at a time, serving approximately 120-150 homeless individuals annually.

Our approach is not simply to provide temporary shelter but to create a structured, therapeutic environment that addresses the root causes of homelessness and equips residents with the skills, resources, and support needed for long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

The Ophelia Myers Manor will offer:

1. Safe, Dormitory-Style Accommodation: Each family will have a private suite with shared common areas to foster community support and accountability.
2. Comprehensive Case Management: Each resident/family will be assigned a dedicated case manager to develop an individualized service plan with concrete goals for housing, employment, education, and personal well-being Financial Literacy and Life Skills Training: Residents will receive practical education in budgeting, saving, banking, credit management, and other essential life skills.
3. Employment Assistance: We will provide job readiness training, resume building, interview preparation, and connections to employment opportunities 5. Parenting Support: Classes and counseling will strengthen parenting skills and family relationships, supporting healthy child development.
4. Health and Wellness Services: Access to physical and mental health services, including trauma-informed care and counseling.
5. Educational Support for Children: Through the Students of Promise Leadership Academy, children will receive academic tutoring, mentoring, recreational activities, and social-emotional support.
6. Nutritious Meals: These are prepared by a licensed chef and dietitian, ensuring proper nutrition for all residents.
7. Transportation Assistance: Help with transportation to appointments, job interviews, and school activities.
8. Permanent Housing Placement: Assistance locating and securing permanent housing, with follow-up support to ensure successful transitions.

With average stays of 90-120 days, we aim to move families from crisis to stability, providing the foundation they need to maintain permanent housing and break the cycle of homelessness.

Murtis Taylor Human Services System: A Trusted Partner

The Murtis Taylor Human Services System, which will serve as the fiscal agent for this project (Amendment Sub. H.B. No. 96), has been a cornerstone of community support in Cleveland for over 60 years. Founded in 1954, Murtis Taylor has grown from a small neighborhood center to a comprehensive human services agency serving over 12,000 individuals annually across Cuyahoga County (*Murtis Taylor Human Services System, Annual Impact Report, 2024*).

Their mission to "empower individuals and families to overcome challenges in achieving self-sufficiency and independence" aligns perfectly with the goals of the Ophelia Myers Manor project. With expertise in behavioral health, youth development, family support, and community outreach, Murtis Taylor brings invaluable experience and infrastructure to this initiative.

Murtis Taylor's accomplishments include:

- Successfully managing over \$15 million in annual funding from various government and private sources (*Murtis Taylor Human Services System, Financial Statements, 2024*)
- Consistently receiving high ratings for fiscal responsibility and program effectiveness (Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Provider Performance Report, 2024)
- Operating the Glenville Family Success Center, which has helped over 500 families achieve stable housing in the past five years (*Murtis Taylor Human Services System, Program Outcomes Report, 2024*)
- Developing innovative mental health programs that have reduced hospitalization rates by 35% among clients (*Cuyahoga County Mental Health and Addiction Services Board, Program Evaluation, 2023*)
- Building strong partnerships with schools, healthcare providers, and other community organizations to provide seamless service delivery (*Murtis Taylor Human Services System, Community Partner Assessment, 2024*)

As fiscal agent, Murtis Taylor will ensure that funds allocated to the Ophelia Myers Manor are managed with the highest standards of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness.

Students of Promise: A Proven Track Record of Success

The Students of Promise program, which will manage the Ophelia Myers Manor, was established in 2007 as part of the Governor's Initiative to Close the Achievement Gap and increase graduation rates among at-risk students. Over the past 18 years, this program has demonstrated exceptional results in supporting vulnerable youth and families.

Recent data from the program's implementation in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District shows that students participate in Students of Promise:

- Increased their average GPA by 1.8 points (Students of Promise Program, Annual Outcomes Report, 2024)
- Improved attendance rates by 22% (Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District, Attendance Analysis for Program Participants, 2024)

- Achieved a 92% graduation rate, compared to 67% for similarly at-risk peers not in the program (Students of Promise Program, Graduation Outcomes Study, 2024)
- Showed significant improvement in standardized test scores, particularly in reading and mathematics (Ohio Department of Education, Achievement Gap Analysis, 2024)
- Reported higher levels of self-efficacy, resilience, and future orientation (Case Western Reserve University, Program Evaluation Study, 2023)

These outcomes have been achieved through a holistic approach that addresses not just academic needs but also social, emotional, and physical well-being. By providing mentorship, individualized support, family engagement, and access to resources, Students of Promise has created a model of intervention that works—a model we now seek to expand through the Ophelia Myers Manor.

The success of Students of Promise gives us confidence that the same principles of excellence, quality service delivery, positive impact, and community engagement will make the Ophelia Myers Manor an equally effective intervention for homeless families. We believe that by addressing the housing instability that undermines educational achievement, we can further enhance the impact of the Students of Promise program and create even stronger outcomes for vulnerable youth and families.

Community Support and Collaboration

The strength of the Ophelia Myers Manor project lies not just in its programmatic approach but in the broad coalition of support it has garnered from local and state leaders. This collaborative effort includes:

- State Senator Kent Smith
- State Representative Juanita Brent
- Cuyahoga County Executive Chis Ronayne
- Cuyahoga County Councilman Pernel Jones Jr.
- The Cuyahoga County Education, Environment and Sustainability Committee
- Cleveland Heights City Council Vice President Davida Russell
- The Cleveland Heights Planning Commission
- Imani Temple Ministries
- Future Plans of Ohio
- PNC Fairfax Connection

Each partner brings unique resources, expertise, and commitment to the project, creating a comprehensive support system for the families we serve. This level of community engagement ensures that the Ophelia Myers Manor will be integrated into the fabric of the community, leveraging existing resources and avoiding duplication of services.

The Human Impact

Behind every statistic about homelessness is a human story—a mother struggling to provide for her children, a child trying to complete homework in a shelter, a family torn apart by economic hardship or

trauma. Let me share with you a composite story that illustrates the type of impact the Ophelia Myers Manor can have:

A working mother of two aged children in a suburb of Cleveland experiencing homelessness as a result were sleeping in the baggage claim area of the Cleveland Hopkins airport, taking public transportation to an area YMCA where they showered and prepared for school each day.

At Ophelia Myers Manor, this family would find not just a safe place to stay but a comprehensive support system. Maria would work with a case manager to develop a plan for stable housing and employment. She would receive trauma-informed counseling to address the impact of domestic violence. Her children would receive academic support, developmental screenings, and mental health services. The family would have access to nutritious meals, healthcare, and a supportive community of peers and professionals.

After their stay at Myers Manor, this family would leave with more stable employment, savings, life skills, a support network, and a lease on an affordable apartment if not a pathway toward home ownership. Her children would show improvements in academic performance, behavior, and emotional well-being. Most importantly, the family would have hope for the future and the resources to maintain stability.

This is the transformation we seek to create—not just for one family but for a multitude of families each year.

Financial Request and Return on Investment

The amendment before you today request \$110,135 in the fiscal year 2026 and \$142,117 in the fiscal year 2027 to support the establishment and operation of the Ophelia Myers Manor. Through your staunch and bold leadership if approved, these funds will be used to:

1. Support staffing, including case managers, counselors, mentors and support staff
2. Provide essential services such as financial literacy, life skills training, and educational support
3. Maintain and operate the facility
4. Develop and implement evaluation measures to track outcomes and ensure accountability.

While this represents a significant investment, the return on this investment is substantial:

- **Reduction in Emergency Services:** By providing stable transitional housing, we reduce the use of emergency rooms, police services, and emergency shelters. Studies show that each dollar invested in supportive housing saves approximately \$2.50 in emergency services costs (*Corporation for Supportive Housing, "Cost-Benefit Analysis of Supportive Housing," 2023*).
- **Improved Educational Outcomes:** Children in stable housing attend school more regularly, perform better academically, and are more likely to graduate. Each high school graduate contributes approximately \$260,000 more to the economy over their lifetime than a non-graduate (*Alliance for Excellent Education, "The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate," 2024*).
- **Increased Employment and Tax Revenue:** By helping mothers gain employment and stability, we increase tax revenue and reduce dependence on public assistance (*Urban Institute, "Employment Outcomes of Transitional Housing Programs," 2024*).

- Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness: Children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless as adults. By intervening now, we prevent future generations from experiencing homelessness (*National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Intergenerational Patterns of Homelessness," 2023*).
- Community Stability: Reducing homelessness strengthens neighborhoods, improves property values, and enhances quality of life for all residents (*Brookings Institution, "The Community Impact of Addressing Homelessness," 2024*).

The requested funding represents less than \$1,000 per individual served annually—a modest investment compared to the estimated \$35,000-\$40,000 annual cost of managing homelessness through emergency services, shelters, healthcare, and other crisis interventions (*United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, "The Financial Cost of Homelessness," 2024*)

Conclusion and Request for Support

Distinguished members of the Finance Committee, the Ophelia Myers Manor represents an opportunity to address one of the most pressing humanitarian and economic challenges facing our communities. By providing comprehensive support to homeless women and children, we can transform lives, strengthen families, and create lasting positive change in Cuyahoga County.

The \$110,135 in the fiscal year 2026 and \$142,117 in the fiscal year 2027 requested in Amendment Sub. H.B. No.96 will enable us to establish and operate a facility that serves not just as emergency housing but as a launching pad for self-sufficiency and stability. This investment will pay dividends in reduced public service costs, improved educational outcomes, increased workforce participation, and stronger communities.

On behalf of the vulnerable families, we seek to serve, I respectfully request your support for this Amendment. By approving this amendment, you will be taking a significant step toward addressing the crisis of family homelessness in Cuyahoga County and creating pathways to stability and success for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to answer any questions you may have about this project and the impact it will have on our community if this amendment is approved.