

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

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

Submitted by: Elizabeth Brown, CEO YWCA Columbus

On Behalf of: Franklin County Shelter Providers Network

Date: June 4, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Homelessness is not merely a crisis affecting individuals, it is a profound challenge to our economy, workforce stability, and public safety. Franklin County now faces an escalating humanitarian and financial emergency, and without decisive action, the consequences will be severe. On behalf of YWCA Columbus, we respectfully urge the committee to support SC0354, a budget amendment granting Franklin County the authority to establish a modest rideshare fee to fund emergency shelter, homelessness and domestic violence services. This measure is not only prudent—it is imperative in addressing one of the region’s most pressing challenges.

Since 2022, homelessness in Franklin County has increased by 24%, with unsheltered homelessness projected to rise an additional 68% by 2028. Families, children, and survivors of domestic violence face the harsh reality of limited resources and dwindling access to safe shelter. The YWCA Family Center, a cornerstone of emergency housing for families, has witnessed the average length of stay expand from 20 days to nearly four months, largely due to rising rental costs and the region’s acute housing shortage.

Compounding this crisis is an alarming financial deficit. Franklin County’s emergency shelter system faces a \$23.5 million funding shortfall, with \$15 million of that gap currently unaccounted for. Without immediate intervention, emergency shelters will be forced to reduce capacity or shutter entirely, leaving families and survivors of domestic violence without safe refuge.

The destabilization of Franklin County’s shelter system will reverberate beyond those in crisis. Housing insecurity directly impacts Ohio’s economy, workforce retention, and public safety infrastructure. Businesses struggle to maintain a stable workforce when employees lack housing, while rising homelessness increases strain on law enforcement and emergency healthcare providers. Franklin County possesses the expertise and infrastructure to operate an effective, outcomes-driven shelter system—but without dedicated funding, these efforts cannot be sustained.

SC0354 presents a responsible, pragmatic solution by authorizing Franklin County to implement a permissive rideshare fee, generating a stable revenue stream specifically designated for emergency shelter operations. This approach does not require new state appropriations, thereby safeguarding Ohio's budget while enabling local leaders to address a critical regional issue. Furthermore, this model reflects policies successfully enacted in other municipalities, affirming that locally tailored solutions are both viable and impactful.

Failure to act will result in severe and immediate consequences. The closure of emergency shelters will force families, including young children, into unsafe living conditions, such as cars or the streets. Survivors of domestic violence will face heightened danger with no secure refuge. Moreover, Franklin County risks forfeiting federal housing dollars due to inadequate shelter infrastructure, exacerbating the housing crisis and undermining economic stability.

Ohio has long demonstrated a commitment to funding essential community resources, including libraries, parks, and cultural institutions. Shelter is no less vital. While affordable housing expansion remains a long-term priority, emergency shelters will always be necessary to support families and individuals in crisis. The ability to access safe shelter should never depend on inconsistent funding. SC0354 provides Franklin County with a practical and equitable mechanism to ensure that emergency services remain available to those in need.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Senate Finance Committee to support SC0354, enabling Franklin County to secure a sustainable funding stream for emergency shelter services. Homelessness should not be a death sentence, nor should it threaten the economic future of our region. The time for action is now—before this crisis escalates beyond control.

Thank you for your leadership and unwavering commitment to Ohio's communities.