

Written Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

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

Submitted by: Maria N. Houston-Beck, Psy.D., Executive Director, LSS CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence

On Behalf of: Franklin County Shelter Providers Network

Date: 6/3/2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of a budget amendment that would authorize Franklin County to implement a local ride share fee to support the region's emergency shelter system, including services for those experiencing homelessness and domestic violence.

First, I want to sincerely thank you for the proposed \$29 million annual appropriation for domestic violence services in fiscal years 2026 and 2027. Of this, \$10 million per year is allocated specifically for shelter services across Ohio. This funding is critical and deeply appreciated. However, I respectfully offer some context. The state's largest domestic violence shelter, CHOICES, requires \$4.6 million annually to operate. This means nearly half of the entire statewide shelter allocation would be needed to sustain a single program—underscoring the significant and ongoing need.

At the same time, domestic violence rates are surging. Since 2022, we've seen domestic violence homicides explode since 2022. According to Columbus Police, there were 7 homicides in 2022 and 23 in 2024, an astronomical increase of 229%. These tragedies are not isolated as they reflect a broader crisis of family instability, trauma, and unmet needs. Domestic violence remains one of the leading causes of family homelessness, making it even more critical to ensure robust shelter and support services are available.

Franklin County's Shelter Providers Network operates nearly 1,400 emergency shelter beds, with an additional 300 overflow beds used during extreme weather or crisis. In 2023 alone, more than 9,500 people—many of them survivors of domestic violence—were served by this system, which uses nationally recognized, trauma-informed practices to deliver safety, food, case management, and housing assistance.

Despite these vital services, our system faces a looming crisis. Emergency shelter programs, especially those serving survivors, have historically been underfunded at the federal level, including through VAWA. Local programs have relied on a fragile mix of general revenue and private donations. That model is no longer sustainable. The temporary funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will end on June 30, 2025, leaving a

\$23.5 million gap in the local shelter system. Over \$15 million of that remains without a defined funding source.

A local ride share fee would provide a sustainable, locally driven funding mechanism to help address this shortfall. It would allow us to continue offering life-saving services and ensure that shelters like CHOICES can remain open and accessible to those fleeing violence.

Thank you again for your leadership and for your investment in Ohioans experiencing domestic violence. I urge your support of this amendment as a necessary step toward building a safer and more resilient future for our communities.

Respectfully,

Maria N. Houston-Beck, Psy.D.

Executive Director

LSS CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence