



Testimony of Elizabeth Martinez

House Bill 96 – State Operating Budget for FY26/27

Senate Finance Committee

June 5th, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support for continued funding for our mentoring services in House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget.

Since 2014, Big Brothers Big Sisters has received \$1 million per fiscal year in TANF funds to support mentoring across the state. Funds are allocated to the Central Ohio agency, which acts as a fiscal clearinghouse and distributes funds to agencies statewide. Thanks to this support, we have been able to make more than 500 new matches each year that funds have been available. Big Brothers Big Sisters has never asked for an increase in funds and have endeavored to maximize the impact of the appropriations provided by the General Assembly.

The DeWine Administration included Big Brothers Big Sisters at \$1 million per fiscal year in ALI 600689 (TANF Block Grant) in their budget proposal. Unfortunately, the Ohio House of Representatives reduced all TANF appropriations by 50% prior to passing their version of HB 96 earlier this year. Earlier this week, the Ohio Senate Finance Committee removed funding altogether. The loss of TANF funds will mean more than 1,000 Ohio children will not benefit from mentoring over the biennium.

The benefits of mentoring relationships are well documented and have been shown to dramatically improve mental health, education performance, and overall success for children. Further, we know that Ohio kids are struggling more than ever before due to the adverse impacts of social media, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and trauma caused by adverse childhood events. We applaud the General Assembly for your focus on tackling these issues and investing in Ohio kids.

Statewide, nearly 2,000 Ohio children are on our waitlists for matches, and we are working constantly to find volunteers and support these children with meaningful interventions. Our mentoring model allows to not only match bigs and littles in order to provide children with a positive adult role model and friend, but it also provides

support for parents and services to be delivered. For example, many of our mentors assist children with schoolwork while our agencies help struggling parents find support such as food or housing assistance. We know the General Assembly is working to tackle the childcare crisis, and Big Brothers Big Sisters is a vital ally in helping parents as they work to support their families.

In closing, I want to stress that Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies in Ohio first began receiving TANF appropriations nearly two decades ago and have been able to make thousands of matches thanks to state support. The DeWine Administration has always included Big Brothers Big Sisters in their budget proposals which shows a desire for continued partnership with our agencies. Our ask is that the General Assembly continue to support the important work of our agencies across the state. I am grateful for our continued partnership with the State of Ohio, thank you for your consideration.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.