

# **Ohio Senate Health Committee**

## **Interested Party Testimony of Ohio Council of YWCAs**

### **HB 96 – FY 26/27 State Operating Budget**

**May 13, 2025**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee:

My name is Leah Merritt, and I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Mahoning Valley. I am also the President of the Ohio Council of YWCAs, which includes 13 YWCA chapters serving communities across the state. Local YWCAs can be found in cities large and small, as well as in remote and rural areas making impact on communities in need.

I am submitting written interested party testimony on House Bill 96. In the Governor's introduced version of the budget, the Ohio Council of YWCAs was allocated \$1.5 million per fiscal year. However, the House-passed version made broad reductions to the TANF Block Grant, which cut our funding in half – to \$750,000 annually. Today, I respectfully urge this committee to restore the full \$1.5 million per year, as originally proposed.

This funding directly supports programming that provides critical, often life-saving services to women, children, and families who have experienced gender-based violence. It also sustains and expands our youth development and prevention initiatives in communities across Ohio.

Specifically, the funding supports Council programs that:

- Provide emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing to families and women in housing crisis, especially those fleeing from violence;
- Deliver trauma-informed services for survivors and families, including counseling, case management, substance abuse treatment while addressing food insecurity and basic needs;
- Offer outreach and education to reduce and prevent violence before it begins, particularly among youth;
- Allow parents to work or attend school while children receive early education and care that prepares them for academic success.

YWCA programs don't just meet short-term needs—we offer wraparound services designed to promote long-term stability and well-being. These services are outcome-driven and community-rooted. Statewide, we deliver after-school care, violence prevention education, and youth programming that changes lives. Ohio's YWCAs do far more than respond to crises. We are leaders in preventing gender violence, combating human trafficking, promoting economic stability, delivering affordable and supportive housing while assisting individuals and families to lead healthy, self-sufficient lives. This investment would amplify those efforts at a time when communities need them most.

Your investment has already produced real results. In the last biennium, with state support:

- Over **304,000 meals** were served to youth and families facing food insecurity;
- Approximately **677 parents and families** received childcare assistance that allowed them to remain in the workforce;
- Nearly **10,600 individuals** impacted by domestic violence and abuse received vital support services.

The need is urgent and growing. In 2023, Ohio reported **36,111 incidents of domestic violence**. Meanwhile, **1 in 5 children in Ohio face hunger**, and **4 in 10 working parents** have had to miss work due to lack of childcare. These numbers reflect the reality we see on the ground every day—and they underscore why this funding is so critical.

While we are grateful for the House's continued investment of \$750,000 per year, restoring the Governor's proposed \$1.5 million will allow us to reach significantly more individuals and expand our impact across the state.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the committee—thank you for your time, also a special thanks to all of you and your staff for meeting with our YWCA members during our advocacy day on May 7, and for your continued commitment to strengthening Ohio's families and communities. I can be reached at the contact information below if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



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Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96  
As Passed by the House

\_\_\_\_\_ moved to amend as follows:

In line 133689, delete "\$750,000" and insert "\$1,500,000"

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The motion was \_\_\_\_\_ agreed to.

SYNOPSIS

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**Department of Job and Family Services**

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**Section 307.80**

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Increases an earmark in Fund 3V60 ALI 600689, TANF Block  
Grant, and GRF ALI 600410, TANF State Maintenance of Effort, for  
the Ohio Council of YWCAs by \$750,000 in each fiscal year (this  
allocation comes from an earmark for the Governor's Office of  
Faith-Based Initiatives).

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Legislative Service Commission

  
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# COUNCIL OF OHIO YWCA'S ROSTER

*There are 13 YWCAs in Ohio, led by 12 CEOs.*

## OHIO COUNCIL OF YWCA'S EXECUTIVE BOARD

**LEAH MERRITT- PRESIDENT**  
YWCA MAHONING VALLEY

**HELEN FORBES FIELDS-VICE PRESIDENT**  
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