

**Senate Health Committee  
Testimony of David Reiersen  
United Way of Central Ohio on Behalf of Siemer Institute Family Stability Programs  
Tuesday, May 13, 2025**

Hello Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is David Reiersen, and I am the Vice President, Public Partnerships with United Way of Central Ohio. I am here today on behalf of the Siemer Institute and our other partner United Ways across the state to thank the Senate for its historical support and championing of the Siemer Institute Family Stability Programs. I am also here to request that the Senate restore TANF Block Grant funding to the level received during the last biennium and to renew a requirement that all public funds received by the Siemer Institute be matched dollar-for-dollar with private funding. The purpose of these changes is to ensure the Family Stability Programs are able to maintain the undeniable success achieved over the last six years.

Inspired by a vision of thriving children, strengthened families, and connected communities, in 2011 Barbara and Al Siemer formalized the work they began in 2003. Born, raised, and educated in Ohio, Barb and Al dedicated their professional careers to Ohio's manufacturing and education sectors. After raising children both in the home and in the classroom, they set a goal to invest in the potential of 1,000,000 children by funding programs that promote the stability of the whole family.

Fourteen years later, the Siemer Institute is a national, private philanthropic institution that collaborates with 79 community-based funding partners across 41 states. By providing multi-year private funding and other vital resources, the Siemer Institute empowers its partners to implement community-specific solutions and build lasting, effective programs.

The expansion and growth of this public-private partnership across the country is only possible because of the innovation modeled by the Siemer's flagship investment. By partnering with six United Ways serving fourteen counties, the public-private partnership between the Siemer Institute, ODJFS, and the Ohio United Way network continues to reach more Ohio families and children each year.

The Family Stability Programs in Dayton, Cleveland, Columbus, Akron, Toledo, and Cincinnati were first funded with TANF dollars in HB 166 of the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, where we received \$1 million dollars per fiscal year with the requirement that we match all public funds dollar for dollar with private donations. When we requested that funding in 2019, the goal was to serve 1,300 families and roughly 3,250 children per year, an increase from the 884 families and 2,271 children we served with private dollars alone. The support provided by the legislature proved to be transformational – in the first year TANF dollars were used to leverage private dollars, the Family Stability Programs were able to serve 2,000 families and 5,300 children. This success led to continued support from the General Assembly and the State. In HB 110 of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the legislature again provided \$1 million per fiscal year, and this amount was increased in HB 33 of the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to \$1.5 million per fiscal year. **All told, state support through TANF dollars over the last six years has allowed the Family Stability Programs to serve 13,086 families and 33,202 children. The matching fund requirement has more than doubled the state's \$7 million investment, resulting in nearly \$16M of public and private funding.** Simply put, the support provided by the General Assembly and the State has allowed us to continue to expand the reach of these critical programs while providing the tools necessary for families to remain stably housed with increased income, and, most importantly, children remain stable in school.

Based on this track record of success and support from the administration, the Governor proposed to increase the earmark to \$2 million per fiscal year in HB 96. The Governor did not include the private matching funds requirement in his budget, but the Siemer Institute testified before the House Children and Human Services Committee in support of reinstating the requirement. Ultimately, the House decided to reduce the earmark \$1 million per fiscal year and move the funding under the Governor's Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives. While we are grateful the House saw wisdom in continuing to fund the Family Stability Programs, returning funding to FY22/23 levels and not including the private funding match will drastically reduce the number of families and children the Siemer Institute and its partner United Ways are

able to serve. It is for this reason that we request your support for maintaining funding and service levels, while allowing us to continue to leverage private dollars.

**The success we have accomplished is supported by real world data. Through the current year, we have prevented 98% percent of the disruptive school moves that are the precursor to many subsequent educational and behavior problems.** Moreover, 79% of the families we work with have obtained or maintained stable housing due to our program's two-generation approach to counseling and intervention. In other words, we are not just stopping the disruptive school move which results in educational set-back and learning loss, we are providing the tools for entire families to establish a firm foundation for growth and improvement.

In addition to our track record of results, we now have the benefit of partnering with the Department of **Job** and Family Services over three consecutive budget cycles. This partnership proves that our programs and methods are TANF eligible, something that can at times be overlooked during the budget process. We also know that using TANF funds for the preventative and early-intervention efforts of the Families Stability Programs gives the State of Ohio a greater return on their investment in children. Because our programs keep children in school and on the path to graduation, we reduce the need for additional community services and other forms of aid. Nationally, the average annual cost to re-house a family is about **\$20,000 to \$30,000**. And a recent study shared by the Eviction Lab found that when students change schools because of an eviction, they experience lower academic performance and increased odds of behavioral issues and school drop-out. Simply put, funds spent on stability efforts improve the lives of those being served while reducing the number of children and families who may need more intensive and expensive interventions.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our request. I am happy to answer any questions.