

Testimony of Holly Trifiro, Executive Director of Teach For America – Greater Cleveland

Though talent is equally distributed across lines of race and class, opportunity is not. Educational inequity profoundly limits the life prospects of too many children in Ohio. More than 550,000 children in this state grow up in poverty. Of them, less than 69 percent will graduate high school by the age of 18; and those who do graduate are 4.5 times less likely to graduate remediation free compared to their higher income peers. State support is critical to our work to close this gap in Ohio.

Children growing up in low-income communities in Ohio lack access to a broad spectrum of resources and attend schools that are not equipped to empower them with the tools to overcome these barriers and fulfill their potential to lead and shape our increasingly dynamic, interconnected world.

Teach For America's mission is to enlist, develop and mobilize a force of leaders committed to equity for all students – the leaders who drive their students to achieve remarkable impact so that one day, all children across Ohio will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education. Our work is urgent, and the statewide need is great. We need continued state support to continue to affect change.

Teach For America recruits corps members from more than 300 colleges and universities across the country. A glance at the 150 highly-effective corps members who worked alongside other committed teachers in Ohio during the 2016-2017 school year reveals: 100 percent of them have significant leadership experience; 51 percent of them are from Ohio; and 31 percent of them identify as people of color. With only 9 percent of all teachers in Ohio identifying as people of color, compared to 25 percent of students, Teach For America plays an important role in closing this gap as a key talent source for high-need public schools in the state.

State funding is critical to supporting our efforts to attract and retain talented leaders in Ohio, and to nourishing our network of leaders, inside and outside of the classroom, to ensure that the issues of educational equity and excellence remain central to the statewide conversation. With state support, we've been able to realize incredible progress.

We've seen proof points of possibility in schools like Village Prep Woodland Hills, where 17 corps members and alums taught during the last school year. The most recent Ohio State Report Card showed that 73.3% of third graders met the requirements for promotion to 4th grade, earning the school a B in the progress component (which looks closely at growth students are making based on their past performances). We've seen them in the classrooms of transformational teachers like Lauren Siegel. For the last two years, Lauren has taught first grade at Walton School, one of Cleveland Metropolitan School District's (CMSD) investments schools. Last year, her students achieved almost two years' growth in reading and a remarkable two and a half years' growth in math based on the NWEA educational assessment.

Corps members grow to be the future leaders of our schools and future advocates for education reform in Ohio and nationwide. Since 2012, our alumni base in Ohio has increased by 211 percent. Informed and inspired by their students, many alumni choose to continue to lead in school communities beyond their initial two-year commitment. 60 percent currently work in education, including 170 alumni teachers and 13 alumni school leaders, like:

- **Jana Fornario**, Assistant Policy Director at Office of Ohio Governor
- **Stephanie Klupinski**, Executive Director of Charter Schools, CMSD

- **Elisa Hoffman**, Cincinnati Public Schools Board Member
- **Hannah Powell**, Executive Director of KIPP Columbus

Others are working to make change from a range of sectors: they are policymakers, founders of advocacy organizations, social entrepreneurs, and business, philanthropic, and civic leaders. When I think of the potential to affect systemic change right here in our state, I think of:

- George Asimou ('00), who pursued school leadership training while practicing law as an alum. Now working in education policy and education law, George and a group of TFA alumni were founding board members of a dual language charter school, called Global Ambassadors Language Academy (GALA) is Cleveland's first dual language (Mandarin/Spanish) immersion school.
- Ben Colas ('13) After watching his kindergarten students struggle with Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, Colas invented KinderKits to give parents the tools and guidance to teach their children skills like recognizing letters and writing their names to start their education on off on the right foot. A testament to the impact of KinderKits, in his first year of teaching 25 of 26 of Colas' entering kindergarteners were unprepared. For his first group of students who got KinderKits, 2/3 showed up on the first day knowing their letters.

All of our alumni, regardless of their chosen profession, have skills and resources that can influence outcomes for students. It's an honor to continue to work with them to inspire, connect, develop and mobilize them to expand their impact across the state.

Continued state support will allow us to extend our geographic reach in Ohio. If we are awarded funding, we would implement a model that allows us to serve a talent-matching function for high-need districts across the state that do not currently employ TFA corps members. Our role would be to confirm candidates' qualifications based on our experience supporting as they matriculate through Teach For America, and to host a career-fair style event where districts will have the opportunity to tout their goals, vision and needs. Based on this information, and the vision our corps members and alumni have for their own professional trajectories, we would coordinate talent matching placement. Not only would this help us meet talent needs statewide, but it will also keep talented leadership here, in Ohio, by bringing even more opportunities to our base.

We are making progress, but there is still more to be done. I do understand that you are facing difficult budget decisions this year, but in order to maintain the pipeline of leadership we need in the state of Ohio – leadership Teach For America is proud to develop -- we need state funding to supporting our efforts. With it, we can continue to attract and retain talented leaders in Ohio and continue our journey toward a day when every student can count on the promise of an excellent public education. I urge you to reinstate support for Teach For America in the Senate's version of the budget.