



House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Senator Sara P. Carruthers, Chair

Interested Party Testimony for H.B. 33

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United Way of Central Ohio**

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Good afternoon Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for this opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33, to establish operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024-2025. My name is David Reiersen, from United Way of Central Ohio, but today I am honored to represent a collective effort of both public and private stakeholders across 6 regions in Ohio – The Siemer Institute, United Way of Central Ohio, United Ways of Greater Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Toledo, and United Way of Summit Medina. I come before the Committee today to request renewal of the current TANF Block Grant earmark which has been used to support these efforts through the Siemer Institute Family Stabilities Program.

In 2011, Al and Barb Seimer started the Siemer Institute with the goal of enhancing educational opportunities for school-aged children by preventing family homelessness and reducing school instability nationwide. Since 2011, the Institute has developed partnerships with local United Ways in more than 60 communities across the country. The Institute currently partners with six United Ways in Ohio (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Summit Medina) to oversee family stability programs which allow for a unique approach to the specific issues of the family and children served and provides case management services and one-on-one guidance and support. The programs funded by the Siemer Institute support families with school-age children that are at risk of becoming homeless by focusing on housing stability, increasing income, reducing school mobility and providing two-generation programming to help families stabilize and thrive. We promote a two-generation approach that meets the needs of children and adults simultaneously to foster academic success and break the cycle of poverty.

In each of the Ohio communities where we currently operate, programs are designed and managed by the local United Way, allowing direct services to be provided by the strongest nonprofit partners in their communities. Each program is unique, but we all work toward the same goals – stable housing, stable schooling and higher income.

In 2019, House Bill 166 of the 133rd General Assembly earmarked \$1 million dollars per fiscal year from the TANF Block Grant line-item to the Family Stability Programs. These state funds were matched by private contributions, consistent with the efforts to expand the reach of these programs as widely as possible. Since then, we are proud to report that the \$3.5M investment of TANF Block Grant funding has been leveraged to secure over \$8M in private match funding by the Siemer Institute, United Way partners across the state, as well as corporate, family, and individual philanthropic contributions.

When we asked for this support in 2019, our goal was to serve 1,300 families and roughly 3,250 children a year, an increase from the 800 families and 2,000 children we served with private dollars alone. The support provided by TANF funding has allowed us to shatter those goals – instead, we served over 2,000 families and 5,300 children during the first state fiscal year of this grant. And through 2022, the family stability programs have helped over 7,600 families and 19,000 children in Ohio. We are seeing a year over year program growth of 25%. Over half of families served had already increased their household income by program completion, over 70% of families successfully secured and maintained stable housing, and nearly 100% of families were able to avoid an unwanted, disruptive school transfer for their children. In other words, we are not just stopping the disruptive school move that 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.

We also know that using TANF funds for the preventative and early-intervention efforts of the Family Stability Programs saves the state in other areas. Because our programs keep children in school and on a path to graduation, we reduce the need for additional community services and other forms of aid. Studies have shown that it is as much as 9 times more expensive to serve families who become homeless than it is to keep them in their homes. Simply put, funds spent on stability efforts improve the lives of those being served while reducing the number of children and families that may need greater, and more expensive, interventions. Given the demonstrable success these efforts have generated, we are constantly looking for partners and additional funding to further our reach and create a greater impact.

The support of the State has allowed us to continue to expand the reach of these critical programs and to successfully provide the tools necessary for families to accomplish stable housing, stable schooling, and higher income.

I would therefore respectfully request that the current TANF Block Grant earmark be renewed and expanded for the upcoming biennium. As was the case during previous biennium budgets, the Siemer Institute and its partners will continue to match the requested \$1,815,000 million per fiscal year earmark dollar for dollar with private contributions. I am confident we will be able to continue to use these funds to better serve our targeted population while also ensuring these families and children are less dependent on other governmental and nonprofit support systems.

I appreciate your time and consideration of our request.