

Witness Testimony

Ohio Senate Finance Committee – May 31, 2023

Mr. Doug Shoemaker, *Director of Employee Engagement, Partnerships and District Civil Rights and Title IX Coordinator*

Whitehall City Schools

RE: H.B. 33 Budget Amendment – United Way Collaborative

Good morning, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Doug Shoemaker. In my role as a Director at Whitehall City Schools my work includes focusing on partnerships as well as Legal services. In a prior career, I was a Juvenile Court Magistrate in Columbus for close to 30 years.

I come to you today on behalf of our Board of Education, Superintendent Wells, and most importantly, on behalf of our amazing 3500 students enrolled in our district. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the district, Whitehall City Schools is an urban public school district in Central Ohio. Our district and city boundaries are surrounded by Columbus and the Columbus City Schools.

Early learning programs like the United Way's Success by 3rd Grade are vital to our students' success, because advancing literacy is the single most important thing, we can do to produce graduates who are highly educated and able to participate fully in the community for the rest of their lifetimes.

Whitehall City Schools does a good job of providing more than 1 years' worth of instruction in each academic year, but we recognize this is not sufficient to meet the needs of all our students. In their pre-K years, our students do not gain the foundational knowledge and experiences required to come to kindergarten as ready to learn as many of their peers attending other districts in Central Ohio and around Ohio. Expanding the Success by 3rd Grade (Sb3G) initiative will mesh with the other areas of collective impact work through the United Way of Central Ohio (UWCO) and its partners, to create a more effective pathway from birth to young adulthood for our students. We need better prepared young students, and we need to produce better-prepared graduates to benefit the region's workforce, area colleges and universities, the military, and the needs of the business community.

Our students face learning barriers in the form of a lack of basic material needs and a high-level of housing insecurity. Frequent moves for children mean that many students in Central Ohio are served by multiple school systems as they progress in their K-12 educational journey. Those systems can work together collectively through proven early learning programs such as the United Way's Success by 3rd Grade (Sb3G) to make education more successful for all students.

Ohio's Educational Service Centers (ESCs) do an excellent job of linking districts together with comprehensive support and expertise related to educational practice, but a partner such as United Way can better access resources and partners who may not reside within the local educational systems that can support districts with addressing students' non-academic barriers to learning and achievement outcomes.

During the summer of 2022, piloting of this effort proved to be very successful for Whitehall City Schools and our young aspiring readers. The curriculum for our work in 2022 with United Way and many local and regional partners focused on four (4) essential and foundational areas of literacy:

- Joy of Reading
- Phonemic Awareness.
- Letter identification and Sight Words; and
- Letter Formation.

Whitehall City Schools continues to provide expertise in the literacy curriculum. The district's community partners, like the United Way, are tailoring what they do and providing what we know our students need. Our Literacy Specialists bring great expertise to bear, and the Success by 3rd Grade program brings resources to magnify our efforts. Literacy instruction is greatly assisted by reading to children to promote the joy of reading. But there are a lot of fundamentals that go into literacy instruction that truly accelerates the journey from learning to read to reading to learn, a fault line demarcated by the transition from grade 3 to 4.

Thank you for your attention and I encourage the members of this committee to support the **budget amendment number #SC1772** as we all do our best to educate our future leaders and our current young readers. This funding will allow the United Way of Central Ohio, together with the partnering United Way agencies, to expand, replicate and scale proven early learning programs, such as the Success by 3rd Grade initiative, along with other initiatives that will have ripple effects on students, families, residents and communities in Central Ohio and beyond.

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for your time today. I welcome any questions or questions you may have regarding my district's support for the budget amendment, which will impact six (6) United Way agencies serving residents and students in ten (10) Ohio counties.

