

Dear Senator Dolan and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

This plea concerns re-instating funding for HB33. We are a collaborator with OAHC.

If you've ever been a teenager or you know one now, you know how difficult youth can be. Young people deal with:

- a changing body – physical changes which can be at least perplexing or at most frightening
- emotions that can be difficult to control due to hormone fluctuations
- confusion about life – how to navigate decisions & choices on based on limited knowledge
- testing out “adulthood” & what that means
- understanding full responsibility for yourself – physical, financial, emotional, spiritual

Healthy Visions has been working with Cincinnati extended-area youth for 38 years with the sole purpose of helping youth and their families navigate these life issues. My name is MaryAnne Scheuble. I am the Acting President of Healthy Visions board. Know that Healthy Visions proudly improves young lives through week-long programs, classroom exercises plus invests in month-long film productions that are created by the students.

Healthy Visions' mission is to provide quality youth educational programs & content that inspire, educate, assist, and empower youth to make decisions toward optimal health (social, emotional, mental, intellectual & physical) for a happier, healthier, and more hopeful future. Healthy Visions values each individual. Each person matters! Healthy Visions teaches that we all deserve respect. It may sound corny but we also teach that every one of us is lovable.

Ohio legislators in the past have seen value in funding OAHC & Healthy Visions. I ask you to commit again now. We all know that Covid changed life – and rarely for the better. Covid disrupted relationships & divided us from loved ones and friends. Covid planted fear and caused us to question simple decisions such as a trip to the grocery store or taking a walk where we might have to engage with someone. If Covid caused such anguish in adult lives, imagine the damage it caused to younger people who did not yet have a 'life framework' in place! The results have been devastating. Most apparent is youth's inability to trust themselves OR others. What a horrible way to live! How paralyzing!

I had the privilege of being in the classroom to observe facilitators who were working on a film project with the students. I was so heartened by the students' comments: “I feel more capable making healthy decisions in relationships”, “I feel more hopeful about my future.”, “When I have a problem, I will now talk with a respected adult”. Teachers are delighted that the students have better attendance when Healthy Visions is there. Parents have also been praising the program “My son is talking to me now!”

We all know that family (however that is defined) is the backbone of society. Each one of us needs that. Now think about how often you get together in social settings where you feel valued and protected. Where you're sitting right now, I'm assuming you feel valued and protected or you likely wouldn't be here. So, you know you have value. People voted for you and know who you are. You have a very important job to do and we depend on you to do it.

Now imagine you are a young person in an inner-city school. What if no one knew you or what you were capable of? What if YOU didn't know what choices you had? All you see is poverty, struggle and the same repeat performances in your community. With a 50% divorce rate in the U.S., your single parent may be working one, two or three jobs. Realistically, your family **will cost** the state money as it requires Ohio services for health care, food stamps, housing, drug rehabilitation services, etc.

Statistics show that when students drop out of school their lifetime income is disastrously impaired. Simply, that means **loss of tax dollars** for Ohio's coffers. More payouts in government services will occur. Looking simply at cost vs. benefit, Healthy Visions' and OAHC programs **SAVE** the state money. Think of it as preventative health care.

So, what's the benefit of cutting dollars? Would you feel good about yourselves for saving a few dollars now that would result in a seriously diminished program that has proven evidential results? If it is important to better manage tax-payer money, you can by fully investing in a program that has proven community and financial benefits.

Please know that your decision whether or not to cut funding can be the difference between life and death for these youth. Suicide rates are up overall but mostly for youth. Through Healthy Visions programs, students have learned to trust each other and listen to cries of anguish and bring in an adult to help. Youth are saved!

I beseech you to provide the funding – in essence, the tools, to reach At-Risk populations with programs that make a positive difference in their lives. Show these kids that their lives matter! Do not let them be destroyed by systemic decisions that enforce the belief that young people - the hope of Ohio society - have no perceived value.

If you cut funding to these successful programs you will condemn Ohio school age students AND their parents to increased poverty levels and a continued cycle of entrapment and despair.

I would be so bold as to request you increase funding. More support is needed in these sad and desperate times; not less. Make this judicious financial decision. Be wise and be brave - fund the future. Fund OAHC.