

Dear Governor,

How will you support Cuyahoga County's health and human service needs?



Dear Governor, how will you support...

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Dear Governor,

The Cuyahoga County Human Services Chamber officially launched in December 2024, just before the human services sector faced unprecedented strain. Nonprofits in our region provide direct services that support our community's safety and prosperity, and account for 12 percent of Cuyahoga County's workforce.

As the new governor, you have a real opportunity to support the people who support Northeast Ohio's people.

Our membership spans the range of human services delivery, from early childhood education to senior services; food insecurity and mental health delivery to arts organizations and healthcare services; and includes large, multimillion-dollar organizations and small, grassroots organizations.

The Chamber's core mission is to "organize collective advocacy, network development, and shared efficiencies for human services nonprofits operating in Cuyahoga County." As part of this work, the Chamber recently conducted a survey of our 130+ members to collect feedback on the sector's status amid recent federal policy and funding changes. The findings reinforce a consistent message:

- Over 60% of survey respondents report rising demand for basic needs alongside flat sector capacity; **43% have had to cut services.**
- Policy changes have increased administrative and financial burdens through new and increased compliance requirements for organizations and the communities. To cover costs, **26% of respondents reported tapping into financial reserves.**
- Even where funding is stable, 80% of respondents report policy changes have affected service delivery, and **87% say ongoing uncertainty limits their ability** to invest, expand, or plan.

The letters that follow offer a view from the front lines of Cuyahoga County's human services sector, highlighting the needs residents and organizations are experiencing, the barriers they face, and how state leaders can help. Ohio's next governor will help determine whether these systems grow stronger and more responsive, or whether rising needs continue to outpace the organizations working to meet them.

We hope you, as the potential future Governor for the State of Ohio, will commit to supporting policies that help strengthen the needs of the Human Services sector and the residents we serve.

Sincerely,

Annette Iwamoto

Director, Cuyahoga Human Services Chamber



Dear Governor,



The Center for Community Solutions is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy and research center founded in Cleveland in 1913. For more than century, we have worked at the intersection of health, social, and economic conditions. Community Solutions is proud to house and incubate the Cuyahoga County Human Service Chamber.

Nonprofit organizations are the front lines of health and human services in Ohio.

We need well-functioning, reliable, stable health and social service systems so nonprofit organizations can provide needed services and supports to help Ohioans thrive. Recent policy choices have made our work more difficult. You have the opportunity to invest dollars targeted to areas of greatest need and biggest impact and to establish policy that can help us be more effective, ultimately serving more Ohioans, better.

Many of these programs and services are federally funded, state sponsored, and county administered with local grantees or contracted organizations providing the services to Ohioans. **About 75 cents of every dollar invested in health and social services in Cuyahoga County came from public sources**, the largest share representing funding originating at the federal level, often allocated through the state budget process. There is no single state agency responsible for human services planning, funding, and oversight. Instead the programs are spread across the Ohio Departments of Aging, Behavioral Health, Children and Youth, Developmental Disabilities, Education and Workforce, Health, Job and Family Services, and Medicaid.

Adding to the complexity, nonprofits generally do their work by cobbling together public funding from government entities and private funding from grants and donations. All come with restrictions and regulations.

Over time, federal and state government have taken more responsibility for the safety net—enacting SNAP for basic hunger relief, Medicaid health coverage for low-income and disabled Ohioans, TANF for very limited cash assistance, and publicly funded child care for low-income working families.

According to estimates from Cuyahoga County, public health and social service programs directly and indirectly touch the lives of more than 500,000 residents in our community, or about 1 in 3 residents.

With basic needs covered, local entities were able to focus attention upstream, identifying and implementing innovative, locally-tailored approaches to breaking cycles of poverty, addressing social issues, reducing chronic disease and health disparities, and giving every child the opportunity to thrive. **This complex tapestry is unraveling.**

Federal cuts and other changes included in H.R. 1 passed by Congress last year shifted the burden of paying for basic needs to states, especially in SNAP. Medicaid changes may mean that more than 10 million Americans lose health coverage not because their economic situation has improved, but because eligibility is so difficult to prove and application systems so complex that people can't successfully navigate it.

These expenses do not disappear simply because the federal government has refused to pay for them. They are picked up by diverting state and local resources away from our priorities and upstream efforts, by health systems which bear the burden of uncompensated care, and in increased costs to society in workers who can't maintain employment because of untreated mental health issues, children who don't have access to high-quality preschool because their parents can't afford child care, or the cost of preventable chronic diseases made worse because of inadequate nutrition.

Ohio has not exercised all the options allowed by federal regulation to ease the burden on our residents and those that serve them directly. For example, as Governor, you could request a one-year delay in implementation of new work requirements in Medicaid giving Ohio agencies, county government, health systems, and ultimately residents more time to roll out these complicated changes. The state could cover the full cost of federal cuts to SNAP administration, but instead is passing the pain to counties.

Nonprofit organizations need a partner in the Governor's mansion who will put everyday Ohioans in the center of policy decisions. We need someone who does everything they can to make systems easier for residents and service providers to navigate. And who ensures that every penny of our valuable public resources are devoted to programs and services which help Ohioans thrive.

We are ready to collaborate.

Sincerely,

Emily Campbell

President and CEO, The Center for Community Solutions



Dear Governor,



As leaders of Benjamin Rose, Northeast Ohio Legal Aid (affiliate of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland), and Greater Cleveland Volunteers, we see every day the growing needs of older Ohioans—and the dedication of the nonprofit organizations working to meet them. We ask you to make strengthening Ohio’s human-services infrastructure a priority of your administration.

Demand for support is growing.

Benjamin Rose has seen significant increases in demand for essential services. In July 2026, 210 people were on the waitlist for home-delivered meals—a 16% increase from the prior year—and 79 people were on the waitlist for an apartment at Margaret Wagner House, a subsidized apartment building for older adults. An older adult may wait up to six weeks to be added to a meal delivery route, and a low-income older adult may wait up to a year for an affordable housing unit.

The most frequently requested services from Benjamin Rose are for assistance with housing and utilities, but pandemic-era funding for these rental and utility assistance ended in June 2025. More than 800 families accessed this service in 2025, which is no longer available.

There is an equally significant capacity gap for civil legal services for older adults. Last year, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland turned away more than 6,000 people because demand for civil legal services exceeded available resources. And older adults are an increasing share of those seeking help: people aged 60 and older accounted for 18% of Cleveland Legal Aid cases in 2022 and 2023, 19% in 2024, and 20% in 2025.

At the same time, Greater Cleveland Volunteers is seeing growing demand both for volunteers and for meaningful ways for older adults to remain connected and engaged.

By 2030, roughly one in four Ohioans is projected to be aged 60 or older.

Our capacity is constrained.

Increasing affordable housing requires substantial capital and ongoing operating support. Nutrition programs face rising food, transportation, equipment, and labor costs, while federal and state funding has not kept pace with inflation. Legal services organizations must turn away people with serious civil legal needs who face threats to their housing, financial stability, and safety. Effectively engaging volunteers who combat social isolation in older adults requires staff time for recruitment, screening, training, matching, and support—as well as transportation and technology solutions. Ohio’s governor can help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As Governor, you will be in a unique position to make meaningful changes to increase resources, improve access, and strengthen the systems that support older Ohioans. You can help by:

- 1 Strengthening community-based services and affordable housing**—Invest in nutrition, housing, and other services that allow older Ohioans to remain safely and independently in their communities, while supporting the workforce and infrastructure needed to deliver them.
- 2 Simplifying access to essential benefits and services**—Explore ways to streamline and standardize applications for programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, and rental and utility assistance, while reducing unnecessary administrative burdens on both residents and providers.
- 3 Investing in community capacity**—Expand transportation assistance and small capacity grants for volunteer recruitment, screening, training, accessibility, and coordination. Ohio can build on existing AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP infrastructure and aging-service networks to engage older adults as volunteers and community leaders.

Ohio's nonprofit organizations and older adults themselves are tremendous community assets. With state leadership and partnership, we can expand the capacity to meet growing needs while helping more Ohioans age with dignity, stability, connection, and independence.

Sincerely,

Orion Bell

President and CEO, Benjamin Rose

Katherine Hollingsworth

Executive Director, Northeast Ohio Legal Aid

Kevin Gross

Executive Director, Greater Cleveland Volunteers



Dear Governor,



As organizations working alongside Ohio students, families, and schools, Say Yes! Cleveland and Communities In Schools of Ohio (CIS) see every day that student success is shaped by far more than what happens inside the classroom.

Across Ohio, schools and families are navigating growing challenges related to chronic absenteeism, mental health and social-emotional well-being, basic needs, housing instability, transportation, and family engagement. These challenges are interconnected. A student who is missing school may also be experiencing housing instability, transportation barriers, unmet health needs, or other circumstances that make it difficult to consistently engage in school.

We are seeing increased demand for coordinated supports that address these barriers before they become even greater obstacles to student success. At the same time, our organizations are seeing the impact that coordinated, school-based supports can have when students and families are connected to the right resources at the right time.

During the 2025-26 school year, CIS of Ohio served more than 21,000 students across 46 schools, including over 2,600 case-managed students who received individualized support. Among students receiving CIS support, 81% met or made progress toward their attendance goals, 82% met or made progress toward their academic goals, and 84% met or made progress toward their behavior goals. Additionally, 90% of our case-managed seniors graduated on time.

During the 2025–26 school year, Say Yes! Cleveland's Family Support Specialists served more than 18,600 students throughout 112 schools. Our team made more than 13,300 referrals for over 8,600 students, resulting in 12,239 successfully connected referrals, and a 92% successful connection rate. **Say Yes! connected more than 8,200 students to food, housing stability, mental health support, and other supports by engaging more than 240 community partners.**

These experiences reflect a broader reality: students and families increasingly need coordinated support to remain engaged in school, overcome barriers, and take advantage of opportunities after graduation.

At the same time, organizations like ours providing these supports are facing capacity challenges. Workforce recruitment and retention, rising demand, administrative requirements, and fragmented funding streams can make it harder to respond quickly and consistently to the needs schools and families are identifying. Resource constraints have meant making difficult decisions about where we can place our teams and provide direct support, even as schools continue to identify significant needs around attendance, academics, behavior, and basic needs.

Ohio's next governor can help by making it easier for schools, families, and community organizations to work together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Strengthen school-community partnerships** by supporting evidence-informed approaches that place trusted professionals in schools and connect students and families to coordinated services.
- 2 Better align state funding and programs** so organizations spend less time navigating fragmented systems and more time serving students and families.
- 3 Strengthen the youth-serving workforce** through strategies that support recruitment, retention, professional development, and sustainable career pathways.
- 4 Improve the use of data across systems** to identify students who need support earlier and measure whether interventions are improving attendance, academic outcomes, student well-being, and family stability.
- 5 Include community organizations in state policy development** so policies affecting young people are informed by organizations working directly with students and families.

Every Ohio student deserves the opportunity to be present, engaged, and successful in school. Helping students reach that potential requires more than any one school, agency, or organization can provide alone. It requires strong schools, engaged families, and community partners working together around the young person.

We look forward to working with Ohio's next Governor and state leaders to strengthen that network and ensure every young person has the opportunity to stay on track, overcome barriers, and succeed.

Sincerely,

Derrick Fulton

Executive Director, Say Yes Cleveland

**Say
Yes!
Cleveland**

Adero Robinson

Chief Executive Officer, Communities In Schools of Ohio

 **Communities
In Schools®**
Ohio

Dear Governor,



Ohio's investments in behavioral health are working. As you prepare your first budget and your first term, we ask you to protect and build on them.

We represent three very different Cuyahoga County organizations. **Positive Education Program (PEP)** is the OhioRISE Care Management Entity for central Cuyahoga County. **The Centers** is one of the region's largest behavioral health providers. **Thrive for Change** is a small, peer-led nonprofit for people with substance-use disorders. Our goal, however, is the same: helping people reach their full potential by addressing mental health and substance use challenges. The results are worth celebrating.

- Since OhioRISE's launch in 2022, **PEP has served over 4,000 young people** with serious, multi-system behavioral health needs. Only about one percent required inpatient re-hospitalization, keeping young people in their homes and communities.
- The Centers opened the Glick Recovery Campus, Cuyahoga County's first 24/7 behavioral health crisis center, **serving the nearly 10,000 people in crisis** who turn to local emergency departments each year a place designed to meet their needs.
- In 2025, Thrive for Change distributed 32,000 doses of naloxone, 48,000 fentanyl test strips, and documented **over 130 overdose reversals** attributed to its work.

Behind each number is a person who found hope and healing. And demand keeps climbing. Before OhioRISE, PEP had an average daily census of 400 across the county in the service on which OhioRISE was modeled; today it serves 1,300 in central Cuyahoga County alone. The Centers' program for people with schizophrenia spectrum disorders grew nearly 80 percent in two years. Thrive for Change now sees over 5,000 engagements annually through street outreach alone, doubling over the last four years. Sustaining these gains depends on decisions you will make in your first months in office. We ask that you:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Protect funding that works. Results like these require reliable funding. In anticipation of increased need following federal-level changes that shift behavioral health funding to prioritize treatment over prevention, there are several actions to consider.

- Maintain funding for OhioRISE and the Child Wellness Campus initiative.
- Implement sustainable financing structures for behavioral health crisis services.
- Strengthen systems to reduce administrative burden, support staffing, and promote sustainability for intake and case management across the behavioral health services landscape.
- Provide reliable, flexible funding for evidence-based overdose prevention measures and peer-led services for individuals with substance-use disorders.

2

Support the Behavioral Health Workforce. All three of our agencies face staffing shortages because reimbursement rates cannot support competitive pay.

- Make the community behavioral health services enhanced rate permanent.
- Expand and strengthen loan repayment support for clinical supervisors, clinicians, nurses, community health workers and peer supporters.

3

Reduce Administrative Burden. Time spent on duplicative paperwork is time not spent with clients.

- Create and require Medicaid managed care plans to share one audit standard and accept each other's reviews.
- Speed Medicaid enrollment for new hires, with billing retroactive to their start date.
- Monitor the impact of Medicaid's new utilization management requirements for community behavioral health services and work with providers to minimize administrative and financial impact.
- Develop strategies to help current Medicaid expansion enrollees remain enrolled and avoid coverage gaps caused by administrative lags.

Ohio has shown what works. We would be honored to host you at any of our sites.

Sincerely,

Eric Gordon

CEO, Positive Education Program

Eric L. Morse, MSSA, LISW-S

President & CEO, The Centers

Bethany Roebuck

Co-Founder & Executive Director, Thrive for Change



Dear Governor,



The Northeast Ohio nonprofit ecosystem is rich with organizations that bring decades of experience serving their communities. At OhioGuidestone, Towards Employment, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited, we have more than a century of combined experience helping Ohioans access workforce opportunities. We believe that while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not.

We urge you to make strengthening Ohio's workforce system a top priority by closing the gap between the talent already present in Ohio's communities and the biggest constraint on businesses' growth—the acquisition and retention of qualified workers.

Tapping into the existing talent pool requires building an expanded talent pipeline that translates business needs into soft and hard skills and qualifications, reaching into communities where talent abounds but opportunity is limited, providing work-based learning, matching newly trained talent with open positions, and supporting incumbent workers in retaining and advancing their careers.

Our organizations are eager to assist you in expanding access to the talent of communities we know well. The jobseekers we serve may face poverty, homelessness, a history of substance abuse, incarceration, or aging out of foster care. They primarily come from neighborhoods with high poverty rates, where schools underperform, the internet is unreliable, and public transportation to jobs is limited.

We work to mitigate barriers to upward wage mobility and to meet local business hiring needs through identifying talent, training, coaching, wraparound services, and strong employer engagement that aligns job preparation with business needs.

Skills-training alone cannot address workforce barriers.

While we applaud Ohio's commitment to employer-driven skills training, including the recent \$300 million JobsOhio program, skills-training alone cannot address the barriers that prevent many Ohioans from completing training and successfully entering the workforce. To fully connect talent to opportunity, Ohio should strengthen the workforce pipeline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Invest in industry sector partnerships that create on-ramps to in-demand careers for untapped talent**—Invest in coaching and wraparound services such as transportation, childcare, housing supports and access to behavioral health services, to help people complete training programs and gain the stability necessary to pursue and retain the job opportunities that businesses need to fill.
- 2 Focus on removing barriers that prevent successful employment**—Policies such as H.B. 29, which have reduced debt-related driver's license suspensions, have helped restore connections to employment. Other proposals, such as the WIN Childcare pilot seek to increase access to quality childcare. Continued attention to the barriers that prevent people from working is essential to building a workforce system that works for both Ohioans and employers.
- 3 Pursue policies that promote the financial success of workers**—Ohio's Benefit Bridge program addresses the benefits cliff by attempting to prevent increased employment income from triggering a net loss in benefits, such as healthcare. The pilot was launched with just \$8 million in state funding, while current data from one county projects \$21 million in taxpayer savings over a decade, and \$6.8 million in lifetime state tax revenue from participants. However, this program could do more through larger, more flexible incentives that promote workers' autonomy. The expansion of work requirements for SNAP and Medicaid recipients adds urgency to investing in workers, ensuring they are prepared to enter and succeed in employment. At the same time, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence requires even closer relationships within the workforce system to understand and respond to changing skill needs.

As Ohio continues to strengthen its workforce, we ask that you take the lead in expanding opportunity for untapped talent, including returning citizens, youth, and those recovering from behavioral health challenges. Greater collaboration and pursuing policies that center worker perspectives provide the key to workforce development success.

Sincerely,

Tania Menesse

President & CEO, Towards Employment



Towards Employment

Brant Russell

President and CEO, OhioGuidestone



Craig Dorn

President & CEO, Youth Opportunities Unlimited



Dear Governor,



Many issues confront the state at this pivotal moment: rising gas prices, rising food prices, public education, healthcare, and more. But one of the single most important issues that people face on a day-to-day basis is housing, made more challenging with rising housing prices, coupled with fluctuations in the policy and regulatory environment.

Ohio's housing and homelessness system is being asked to do more. Across Cuyahoga County, our organizations are seeing greater housing instability, longer shelter stays, increasingly complex barriers among people experiencing homelessness, and growing difficulty moving households quickly into permanent housing.

The need for affordable housing and homelessness assistance continues to outpace available resources.

Families and individuals are struggling, people remaining homeless longer, households needing assistance to avoid losing housing, and face greater difficulty locating units that voucher holders can afford and landlords will accept.

In 2025, LMM served 3,824 people experiencing homelessness, including more than 2,800 residents at Ohio's largest men's shelter. Our experience highlights how rising housing costs, behavioral health needs, and disability-related challenges are making it increasingly difficult for vulnerable residents to secure stable housing. With an average investment of just \$949 per household to prevent or resolve a housing crisis, 93 percent of households remained housed after receiving Flex Fund assistance.

West Side Catholic Center served 8,860 people in 2025 through food assistance, emergency shelter, housing support, employment services, and family programs. Investment in a new food distribution model with walk-in refrigeration and a storefront setting improves both capacity and dignity. Integrated supports like food, housing, benefits assistance, and healthcare are all in one place, including a relationship with MetroHealth.

EDEN helped 10,910 people through supportive housing, rental assistance, homelessness prevention, and emergency shelter services in 2025. Working at the intersection of housing and homelessness, a focus is on prevention rather than waiting until homelessness occurs. A 62-unit senior development reserves 25 units for veterans, as well as managing 14 permanent supportive housing buildings.

The populations needing assistance are also increasingly complex, with many needing ongoing services and housing stability supports. A shortage of affordable units, rising rents and operating costs, and reluctance among some property owners to accept rental assistance can turn even a relatively small financial or administrative barrier into prolonged homelessness.

Public investment has not kept pace with the actual cost of operating emergency shelters, preventing homelessness, and helping households secure and sustain housing. At the same time, complex administrative demands consume scarce organizational capacity without necessarily producing better outcomes. Even proven interventions like Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing cannot function at scale or speed.

Lean organizational operations make it difficult to recruit LSW, LISW, LPC, and LPCC-licensed professionals into the workforce, and they instead join clinical environments that can offer more. Governmental funding challenges leave organizations relying on unrestricted contributions to cover most salary and benefit costs for non-program staff, which are essential to the regulatory and reporting requirements needed to operate. Every dollar and staff hour devoted to duplicative administration misses an opportunity to house Ohioans.

Housing innovation with limited resources is still possible. LMM is piloting new housing models including shared housing, modular solar homes, and the exploration of 3D-printed affordable housing in Cleveland; West Side Catholic Center is integrating services and partnerships in a coordinated response to poverty, focused on housing, food security, and healthcare; and EDEN is modernizing systems while developing and preserving housing stock, for long-term housing development to address evolving community needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preserve and expand existing homelessness and housing-stabilization resources.
2. Create an accountable cross-agency housing strategy aligning Medicaid, behavioral health, corrections, child welfare, aging, etc.
3. Reduce administrative fragmentation and standardize eligibility, reporting, monitoring, reimbursement, and compliance requirements across state-supported housing programs, while simplifying unnecessarily complex development and financing processes like LIHTC.
4. Create pathways to test and scale housing innovation, supporting locally developed approaches that can produce deeply affordable housing more rapidly and efficiently.

Ohio has the chance to move more people from crisis to permanent housing and prevent homelessness before it begins. We're ready to help.

Sincerely,

Maria Foschia

President & CEO, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry

Michael V. Bernot

Executive Director, West Side Catholic Center

Elaine Gimmel

Executive Director, Emerald Development and Economic Network, Inc. (EDEN)



Dear Governor,



Every day, LGBTQ+ Ohioans walk through the doors of community-based organizations looking for more than a program or service; they are looking for a place where they are safe, understood, and connected to people who can help.

At the **LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland** and **Colors + Youth Center**, we see these needs across the lifespan. LGBTQ+ adults may need affirming mental health and recovery support, help meeting basic needs, or opportunities to reconnect with community, while LGBTQ+ youth may need trusted adults, supportive peers, help navigating school or family challenges, and safe spaces to build confidence and belonging.

Together, our organizations increasingly serve as a front door to a wide range of needs by connecting LGBTQ+ adults, youth, and families with health and wellness services, mental health support, basic needs assistance, education, mentorship, leadership opportunities, creative expression, and affirming community.

The LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland serves approximately 6,400 people each year through direct services and reaches more than 18,000 through education and outreach. Our work encompasses health and wellness, behavioral health and recovery, youth and older adult programming, basic needs assistance, community building, education and navigation. At Colors+ Youth Center, young people and their families seek social programming, leadership development, mentorship, workforce readiness, arts and creative expression, mental health support, and safe opportunities to build relationships with peers and trusted adults.

The demand we experience is not occurring in isolation. Local data tell us why these supports matter.

The **Greater Cleveland LGBTQ+ Community Needs Assessment**, completed by 1,653 LGBTQ+ respondents, documents significant health, safety, and economic disparities. Respondents reported high levels of depression (58%), anxiety (53%), PTSD (24%), suicidal ideation (21%), and self-harm (12%). Beyond mental health, 30% had experienced food insecurity, 24% housing insecurity, 32% workplace discrimination, and 55% worried about their safety or acceptance in parts of Greater Cleveland because of their LGBTQ+ identity.

For LGBTQ+ youth, the need for safe and affirming environments was especially clear: all surveyed youth ages 12–17 reported identity-based bullying. Youth also identified mental health resources, stronger anti-bullying protections, trained educators, supportive schools, GSAs, and creative and recreational spaces as priorities. These concerns align with broader findings that 25% of LGBTQ+ students surveyed experienced discrimination in educational settings and 93% had to find LGBTQ+-inclusive sexual health information on their own.

Our organizations are expected to provide accessible, relationship-based support while maintaining the staff, facilities, systems, partnerships, and infrastructure needed to do that work well. When affirming health and social-service options are limited, we also help adults, youth, and families navigate referrals, waitlists, transportation, insurance, and unsuccessful connections to care

At the same time, funding often prioritizes crisis response over prevention. Yet supports such as belonging, trusted relationships, mentoring, leadership, creativity, recreation, peer connection, and safe community spaces are critical to helping LGBTQ+ people, especially young people, thrive before a crisis occurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pass the Ohio Fairness Act.
2. Enforce nondiscrimination protections in essential services.
3. Expand the affirming behavioral-health and recovery workforce.
4. Improve confidential sexual-orientation and gender-identity data collection.
5. Provide flexible, multi-year funding for LGBTQ+ organizations.
6. Strengthen partnerships across community, education, health, and government systems.
7. Invest in LGBTQ+ youth prevention, belonging, and social supports.
8. Remove barriers to confidential mental-health support for youth.
9. Increase funding for youth-focused peer-support organizations.
10. Simplify state grant applications and reporting requirements.

The state government cannot meet every need by itself. Neither can community organizations. But Ohio can decide whether the systems supporting LGBTQ+ people make it easier or harder for them to find safety, health, stability, and belonging.

How will you partner with LGBTQ+ Ohioans and the organizations they already trust to make that possible?

We are ready to be part of that work.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Harris (She | Her)

Executive Director, LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland



Malik Swisher (He | Him)

Executive Director, Colors+Youth Center



Dear Governor,



On behalf of Friendly Inn Settlement, East End Neighborhood House, West Side Community House, University Settlement, and Lexington-Bell Community Center we ask you to strengthen the neighborhood institutions that help Cleveland and Cuyahoga County residents build stable lives.

For generations, our settlement houses have provided childcare, youth development, family support, senior programming, food assistance, and connections to essential resources.

Communities rely on trusted partners to help navigate challenges involving poverty, housing, health, and neighborhood safety.

Increasing demand

Families face rising costs for food, utilities, transportation, childcare, and housing. Community violence and barriers to mental health and substance use treatment compound these pressures. Residents often need several services at once, requiring coordinated support rather than isolated referrals.

Capacity and financial impact

Funding uncertainty, restrictive contracts, reimbursement requirements, and rising operating costs strain our capacity.

Competitive compensation, insurance, aging facilities, and compliance obligations place additional demands on limited budgets.

East End Neighborhood House faces the potential loss of \$461,569 in county funding supporting family and senior services that reach approximately 400 families and more than 250 older adults annually. West Side Community House faces a \$330,000 funding reduction affecting two major programs serving approximately 500 families and 150 seniors.

These losses threaten service availability and place added pressure on other community providers and public systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Strengthen sustainability.** Expand flexible, multiyear support that recognizes staffing, facilities, transportation, and service coordination costs.
- 2 Improve administration.** Simplify compatible grant applications and reporting requirements, streamline reimbursement, and establish reliable payment timelines.
- 3 Support the workforce.** Develop paid training and career pathways that help neighborhood organizations recruit and retain qualified staff.
- 4 Coordinate prevention and care.** Connect youth development and violence prevention with accessible behavioral health services, food assistance, workforce opportunities, and housing stabilization.
- 5 Include community voices.** Engage settlement houses and residents in identifying barriers, shaping policy, and evaluating practical improvements.

We invite each candidate to a nonpartisan meeting or community visit to hear directly from residents and organizations. Our purpose is constructive dialogue and partnership.

Together, we can sustain essential services and help Ohio families and neighborhoods thrive.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Y. Armstrong, MSSA, LSW

President & Chief Executive Officer, Friendly Inn Settlement, Inc.



Atunyese Vanessa Herron, MBA

President & CEO, East End Neighborhood House



Rachelle Milner, MSSA, LISW-S, BCCC

Executive Director, West Side Community House



Tracey N. Mason

Interim Executive Director, University Settlement



Lu Anne Peters

Executive Director, Lexington-Bell Community Center



Dear Governor,



Re:Source Cleveland and A.S.I.A., Inc serve refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers across Northeast Ohio. Together we reach thousands of people each year. Our clients work in Ohio's hospitals, factories, warehouses, and small businesses. Their children graduate from Ohio high schools and enroll in Ohio colleges. They are building their futures in Ohio.

In a NYT op-ed last August, Governor DeWine argued restricting legal immigration works against Ohio's interests. We want to continue a conversation about what we are seeing, where we are stretched, and what the state can do. We are ready to be a resource to your administration from day one.

Immigrants represent 60 percent of Ohio's growth in the past decade. Cutting off that growth means Ohio stops growing.

What rising demand looks like

When H.R.1 ended Medicaid coverage, refugees fully eligible the day before found the rules changed around them. Paired with the SNAP changes, this is a crisis.

We serve hundreds of these families. A single eligibility change can affect food security and stability for an entire household. A mother and her two adult children arrived in Cleveland in 2024 as refugees. Both adult children work full time in entry level jobs. They pay payroll taxes. They support their mother, who is sixty. She has chronic health conditions that require regular appointments and regular medication. Medicaid covers that today. On October 1, it did not.

Where we are stretched

Our greatest pain point is simple. Federal policy has moved a large volume of work onto community organizations without moving any resources with it.

The people affected are already working. They staff Ohio's long-term care facilities, food processing plants, and construction sites. When they lose coverage, they do not stop working. They stop going to the doctor.

Families that lose Medicaid or SNAP come to our offices looking for help and hope. They need guidance with eligibility screening, connecting with County Job and Family Services, medical referrals, and help with work requirements. No public funding stream supports this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Protect families who lost Medicaid and SNAP under federal eligibility changes.

Federal eligibility changes impact thousands of Ohioans and over 1,400 in Greater Cleveland. Many removed from SNAP are children. We ask the state to create a state-funded coverage program for those who lose federal eligibility for healthcare, and a state-funded food benefit for the same families.

2

Guarantee driver's license and ID access for lawfully present Ohioans.

In February 2026 a federal court ordered that the Ohio BMV stop denying licenses to refugees whose entry documents are more than two years old and to 16- and 17-year-olds whose parents cannot cosign because of their status. We ask your administration to codify compliance in BMV rule and statute, extend it to asylees, parolees, and TPS holders with pending renewals, and direct the BMV to accept USCIS receipt notices as proof of status.

A license is the difference between a job and no job for most of our clients. Parole applications can outlast the original parole period, leaving many with expired status. They cannot renew their work authorizations or driver's licenses. High school seniors cannot access federal student aid or qualify for in-state tuition. Accepting pending USCIS applications as proof of status keeps families working and students in school.

3

Put newcomers to work in the jobs Ohio cannot fill.

Ohio is short on nurses, skilled trades workers, and childcare providers. The expansion of international credential recognition and education programs targeted to newcomers would allow adults to successfully move into high demand positions on a career track. Being stuck in entry-level positions with low wages prevents families from moving forward and does little to address Ohio's skilled workforce gap.

4

Restore basic human dignity for all residents of Ohio

Ohio must restore basic human dignity, respect, and compassion for all residents of Ohio regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. Arbitrary targeting and profiling of residents resulting in unlawful and inhumane detention in facilities across Ohio must be halted. We must observe the democratic principles that have shaped our nation to be the voice of democracy across the world.

These four steps cost little and draw on authority the state already holds. Our organizations are ready to help your administration deliver on that. We would welcome the chance to host you or your staff at our programs in Greater Cleveland.

Sincerely,

Patrick Kearns

Executive Director, Re:Source Cleveland

Harry Kamdar

Chief Executive Officer, A.S.I.A., Inc.



Dear Governor,



As Ohioans, we must commit to ending human trafficking and sexual violence. Effective prevention begins with understanding how violence occurs in familiar relationships and everyday settings, and addressing the conditions that allow exploitation and abuse to take hold. We urge you to make prevention of sexual violence and human trafficking a priority for Ohio by investing in community prevention, strengthening early intervention, and coordinating a statewide public health response.

Prevention means recognizing risks in our schools, families, relationships, workplaces, and communities. It also means strengthening protective factors such as safe relationships, stable housing, and access to support while building capacity to respond before violence occurs. Cleveland and Cuyahoga County have been working on that challenge for years.

Preventing violence is beyond the responsibility of any one organization or system.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center and the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking bring complementary experience to this work. Preventing violence is not the responsibility of any one organization or system. It requires communities, service providers, schools, health care providers, law enforcement, government, and other partners to recognize risk, strengthen protective factors, share knowledge, and act earlier.

Northeast Ohio has spent years building that collaboration, and Ohio can build on that experience to strengthen violence prevention statewide.

That experience reveals where state leadership can have impact. Ohio has an opportunity to support organizations responding to sexual violence and human trafficking, and strengthen systems and strategies that can prevent violence in the first place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Invest in prevention and make prevention funding accessible.

Ohio has already taken steps to recognize the importance of prevention, including requiring schools to provide age-appropriate prevention education. But requirements alone do not create the capacity to deliver effective prevention.

Ohio should provide sustainable support for evidence-informed prevention education, including human trafficking prevention, and make state resources easier for qualified community organizations and schools to access. This investment should also support organizations that convene partners and build local prevention capacity.

2

Strengthen early intervention.

People often interact with schools, health care providers, social services, law enforcement, and other systems before they connect with a specialized organization. Ohio can help those systems recognize warning signs earlier and connect people safely to support. Strengthening coordination, screening, referral, and intervention can help communities act before violence occurs.

Ohio should also support seamless, trauma-informed services so survivors can access coordinated care and ongoing support wherever they seek help.

3

Build a statewide public-health approach to prevention.

Ohio does not need to start from scratch. State agencies, local governments, schools, health systems, law enforcement agencies, and community organizations are already doing important work to prevent sexual violence and human trafficking.

Ohio can strengthen that work by coordinating efforts, measuring the problem, analyzing risk and protective factors, investing in approaches that work, and expanding them where they show results.

Ohio has the expertise and community partnerships to make meaningful progress. As Governor, you can bring those pieces together by strengthening prevention, helping communities intervene earlier, and bringing existing efforts together to do more of what works. We stand ready to work with you, alongside the many Ohioans and organizations working to prevent sexual violence and human trafficking.

Sincerely,

Nicole McKinney-Johnson

President & CEO, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center



Kirsti Mouncey

President & CEO, Collaborative to End Human Trafficking



Dear Governor,



The Greater Cleveland Funders Collaborative (GCFC) is a network of 30 Northeast Ohio public and private foundations that partners with nonprofits, businesses, collaborative groups, and government entities to strengthen the resiliency of the local nonprofit sector and broader community and effect policy change. Our members work across sectors and alongside the organizations and public systems that support children, families, and communities throughout our region.

We see the extraordinary commitment of Ohio's human services organizations and the growing pressures on their ability to meet community needs. **These organizations provide essential services that help Ohioans remain healthy, housed, fed, connected, and economically secure.**

At the same time, they are being asked to respond to more complex needs while managing rising costs, workforce challenges, and greater operational demands. Their commitment is substantial, but their capacity is finite. As funders, we see what happens when escalating community needs meets constrained public and nonprofit capacity.

When public systems are under-resourced, difficult to navigate, or designed in ways that shift costs downstream, those costs do not disappear. Counties, providers, community organizations, families, and, increasingly, philanthropy shoulder them.

Philanthropy cannot replace lost public dollars. Our limited resources are best used to complement public systems by building organizational capacity, responding to emerging needs, bringing partners together, and helping communities develop and test promising approaches. Ohio's next Governor has an opportunity to improve the public systems on which Ohioans and the organizations serving them depend.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Expand access to publicly funded child care, including increasing income eligibility toward 200 percent of the federal poverty level, while strengthening reimbursement and the early childhood workforce so families can access high-quality care and providers remain viable.
- 2 Extend and expand the Ohio Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, created in 2023 to provide state resources that help maximize federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit investment and increase the development and preservation of affordable housing throughout Ohio.

- 3 Sustain and grow critical state investments, policies, and mechanisms in school-based health and school-based health centers (SBHCs), including: the Medicaid School Program, Ohio Department of Health grants and Ohio SEE program, and Student Wellness and Success funds.
- 4 Ensure every Ohioan can easily access workforce, benefits, housing, child care, emergency supports, and opportunities through 211, a single trusted entry point.
- 5 Support the creation of a refundable Ohio Child Tax Credit and make Ohio's Earned Income Tax Credit refundable.

We encourage your administration to engage nonprofit partners, philanthropy, local government, and communities early in the development and implementation of policies that affect them. These partners bring practical knowledge about how policies work on the ground and where unintended barriers can arise.

A strong nonprofit sector and a strong philanthropic community are important assets for Ohio.

They have the greatest impact when they complement, rather than compensate for, healthy public systems. We look forward to partnering with your administration to better meet the needs of Ohio's communities.

Sincerely,

Greater Cleveland Funders Collaborative

