

DEFIANCE, OHIO COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORTS CENTER AT DEFIANCE COLLEGE

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

I: INTRODUCTION

The City of Defiance, Ohio is seeking Congressionally-Directed Spending of **\$2,771,000** under the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Program, to establish a **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** on the campus of Defiance College.

The core feature of the fiscal year 2025 Community Development appropriation being sought would be the upgrade of existing outdoor track and field facilities to bring them up to standards required for middle school, high school and sports tournaments, meets and youth camp activities; upgrade of two existing grass soccer fields on campus to make them safe and to meet standards for use by youth participants, practices, travel team play, tournaments, meets and summer camps; construction of a youth athlete and public restroom complex near these outdoor athletic playing fields for use during tournament, league and special activities events; and installation of a movable synthetic playing surface in the infield of the existing Smart Center indoor track, that would allow for the set-up of volleyball, basketball and small sided soccer courts for youth.

Defiance has a current working partnership with the YMCA of Defiance – a non-profit organization that would also have access to the facilities to augment their ongoing programs for youth.

The upgrade and modification of existing Defiance College athletic facilities will provide unique opportunities for youth from low- to moderate income families throughout this rural region of Ohio, the surrounding counties and the State, to use these upgraded facilities to participate in a wide range of sports; participate in tournaments and league play; and attend affordable summer sports camps run by the City and the College. Concurrently, and most significantly, this one-time appropriation would invest in one of the top economic engines for the City of Defiance and Defiance County—**Defiance College**- by opening its improved campus facilities to youth throughout the Region and the State.

Defiance College is an economic development driver in the City of Defiance and in Defiance County, with an annual economic impact of over \$50,000,000. The proposed funding for a **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** would be a cost-effective way to create desperately-needed sports facilities for Defiance County youth; stimulate an increased, sustained increase in out-of-town visitors to the City and its businesses; and help to trigger

solid, growth in enrollment to bolster and sustain the critical economic development, anchor role that Defiance College continues to play in the region.

The grantee will be the City of Defiance, Ohio and further cement the historic, outstanding working partnership between the City of Defiance and Defiance College. Furthermore, the establishment of the **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** Initiative would be jointly administered by the City Administrator of the City of Defiance, and the Director of Athletics at Defiance College.

//: CONSISTENT WITH STATUTORY PROVISIONS UNDER 42 U.S.C. 5301 AND OTHER SECTIONS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACT, AS REQUIRED BY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

The original 1974 Community Development statute (Public Law 93-383, as amended 42 U.S.C. 5301 et seq.) had its origins with the intent of providing funding to economically disadvantaged communities to promote ‘economic opportunities’ and support for community development activities, including under Section 5301(c)(5) support for community development activities directed toward:

“(5) a more rational utilization of land and other natural resources and the better arrangement of residential, commercial, industrial, **recreational, and other needed activity centers;**”

This provision was included under the initial section of the Act under ‘Congressional findings and declaration of purpose’.

Not only does the proposed project forge a partnership between the City of Defiance and Defiance College, its primary purpose is to make better use of land owned by the College to create a new ‘recreational and other needed activity center’ usage of such land for youth sports activities throughout Defiance County, the region, and the State—and beyond its borders.

Compliance with Legislative Intent of Section 5305(a)(1)(C) and (D):

While this project does not involve the acquisition of real property, the Community Youth Sports Center project is consistent with the *legislative intent* of Section 5305(a)(1)(C) that calls for, among other things, ‘the provision of recreational opportunities’ and under (E) to be used for other public purposes.

Again, as described in this proposal, the Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center will significantly enhance recreational and sports activities for Ohio youth programs—including the Defiance Area YMCA—through the construction, reconstruction and renovation of existing, aging sports facilities on the campus of Defiance College. The City believes that this is an innovative way to provide new recreational/sports opportunities for not only for the youth of

our City and County, but for Ohio youth sports teams, their coaches, families and friends throughout the State of Ohio and from other States.

Compliance with Section 5305(a)(2):

This section authorizes projects that, among other things, call for the construction, reconstruction or installation of... ***“facilities (except for buildings for the general conduct of government), and “site or other improvements”.***

As stated in the narrative of the full proposal, this project will involve the ***“construction, reconstruction or installation of facilities and other improvements”*** to enhance the availability of upgraded recreational and sports facilities for youth, their teams, their coaches, and friends that have never been made available to the youth of Defiance, Ohio or the County (Defiance County) in which the City is located. These reconstructed, constructed and upgraded facilities will serve as a catalyst for increasing revenues into the economy of the City and the Region as the City plays host to a wide range of tournaments, meets, high school and college playoff competitions, sports camps, and other recreational activities that will significantly benefit the local economy and its businesses.

Compliance with Section 5305(a)(4):

The linchpin of the proposed project is the renovation, reconstruction and rehabilitation of existing facilities on the campus of a non-profit institution of higher education for the sole purpose of dramatically increasing youth recreational and sports activities to attract sports teams, tournaments, playoff competition and other youth sports activities that will be attracted to the City of Defiance, Ohio. The project will have a two-fold economic development impact on this low to moderate income rural area: (1) to bolster economic stimulus to the region by providing desperately needed youth sports and recreation facilities to enhance youth sports programs and ‘sports tourism’ opportunities for the City, County and State; and (2) to significantly bolster the financial components of the major economic driver in the City of Defiance, Ohio—Defiance College—through increased enrollment in this vital institution of higher education that annually generates over \$50,000,000 in economic impact for the region.

Therefore, the project proposed is compliant with Section 5305(a)(4) that, among other things, calls for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of buildings and improvements at a non-profit entity in Defiance, Ohio. This Section of the Community Development Act also allows for the renovation of closed school buildings. While the facilities to be renovated for youth sports activities on the campus of Defiance College are not closed, they have not undergone any substantial upgrade or renovation since they were initially installed decades ago.

Compliance with Other Committee Requirements:

The Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center project will be administered by the City of Defiance, Ohio in partnership with Defiance College, a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity.

The proposed project is NOT intended for beautification or historic preservation.

The project is a community development project which will have historic, transformational economic benefits for the City and a College that is an economic driver in the region, and, as stated above, generates an annual economic impact of over \$50,000,000 to the City, the County and the Region.

In summary, the Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center initiative is consistent with the goals and objectives of 42 U.S.C. 5301 and 5305, and the economic development purposes that Congress envisioned when it enacted the historic 1974 Community Development Act. We believe that it fits within the requirements set forth by the Committee as an eligible recreational facility improvement project and a project that will stimulate historic economic growth and development in Defiance, Ohio and throughout this Region of the State of Ohio.

III: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO STIMULATE ECONOMIC GROWTH

A cornerstone of the original Community Development legislation was to address, among other things, unemployment and *other economic matrices that reflect the need for increased economic development opportunities.*

The primary means towards this end is the development of partnerships among all levels of government and the private sector, including for-profit and non-profit organizations. Unlike some college towns, the City of Defiance and Defiance College have demonstrated a deep, sustained interest in collaborations, partnerships, and joining forces to mobilize resources to address local and regional issues of importance to Defiance residents.

For example, the Upper Maumee River is the sole source of drinking water for the City of Defiance. Water is drawn from the Maumee River to replenish the City's 74-acre up ground reservoir which acts as a pre-treatment basin. Water is then pulled from the reservoir to into the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) to ensure a more consistent water supply. Primary concerns with our surface water supply are an abundance of nutrients and the potential for harmful algal blooms (HABS). Nutrients include nitrates, ammonia, and phosphorus. Growth of algae is often caused by excess nutrient loading and can be problematic for both treatment of drinking water and for managing the reservoir's water supply.

To address these critical environmental issues, experts at the City of Defiance and Defiance College environmental science faculty and students, and local high schools, forged a partnership to create a research alliance to engage all stakeholders in the watershed region in a collaborative effort to find solutions to these problems.

By engaging the only postsecondary educational institution in the County, and students from Defiance public schools, Defiance College harnessed student excellence, and leveraged community research and development assets to carry out applied research to tackle issues directly attributable to the Defiance sector of the Upper Maumee River Watershed. A *Maumee River Data Research Center* was established at Defiance College, a valuable data collection and analysis resource for the Mayor of Defiance; farmers, researchers, conservation experts, and other stakeholders who would benefit directly from the valuable data developed within the Defiance sector of the Upper Maumee Watershed in Ohio.

The **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** is another partnership that will be developed to merge the need for additional economic development stimulus; and the needs of City youth, with the resources and long-term needs of the anchor institution of higher education in the City – a merger that will stimulate additional business for the region; increase the economic impact of Defiance College in the region; and provide Defiance youth access to world class sports facilities and opportunities to participate in summer sports activities near their homes.

This is precisely the kind of partnership envisioned between local government and a for-profit or non-profit entity to increase economic development opportunities while providing long-overdue access for youth throughout the region, to world-class athletic facilities and youth sports opportunities.

The region's socio-economic demographics are consistent with the underlying focus of HUD Community Development programs on areas of the country with economic challenges.

Based on the HUD Exchange Information network, Defiance County consists of 36.09% low to moderate income residents and the City of Defiance, Ohio consists of 40.83% low to moderate income citizens.

Defiance County is a low- to moderate income part of the State of Ohio with a 10% poverty rate; per capita median income of \$32,035; median household income of \$65,779; and an unemployment rate that is 8.2% ---more than double the current National unemployment rate (3.8% Bureau of Labor Statistics, September, 2023).

Despite being a small rural city, the City of Defiance, Ohio has two, designated Opportunity Zones that represent 47% of the city's total population of 17,000. The median household income for Defiance Opportunity Zones ranges from approximately \$50,000 to \$55,000.

For all of these reasons, the City and its partners at Defiance College firmly believe that the proposed Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center is consistent

with the economic development goals; objectives; and mandates of HUD Community Development Fund programs, and will benefit low-moderate income youth and their families throughout the City of Defiance (population 17,000) and Defiance County.

IV: FURTHER JUSTIFICATION FOR DEFIANCE, OHIO COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORTS CENTER AT DEFIANCE COLLEGE

The justification for the proposed **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** on the campus of Defiance College has three primary components:

O Economic Stimulus for Businesses in Defiance, Ohio

There is a direct correlation to be realized between the upgrade and modification of Defiance College athletic facilities, and their role in stimulating more visitor revenue to City of Defiance businesses.

Specifically, one primary objective of the partnership between the City of Defiance and Defiance College is to attract more youth travel teams and youth league tournaments/meets to Defiance from within the State of Ohio and from bordering states. The upgrade of athletic facilities already in place at Defiance College is a cost-effective way to bring hundreds of soccer, volleyball, track and field and other athletes, their coaches and families, searching for an area with world class facilities, and amenities. Better athletic facilities and new opportunities for youth sports play means more young people and their families using Defiance restaurants, hotels, parks and attractions.

O New Sports Participation Opportunities for Defiance Youth at Defiance College

The linchpin of the **Defiance, Ohio Community Youth Sports Center** plan is to provide access for youth to unique, sports opportunities presented by the upgrade and modification of volleyball, soccer, track and field, and basketball facilities at Defiance College—the only postsecondary institution of higher education in the City of Defiance. The enhancement of Defiance College’s existing student athlete athletic buildings, equipment and facilities, coupled with an innovative modification of the Smart Center on campus will provide world class outdoor and indoor youth sports opportunities for local high schools, middle schools, travel teams, the local YMCA, and a sustained venue for State championship playoff events.

In addition, the partnership between the City and the College would work collaboratively to establish a significant portfolio of summer sports camps at Defiance College that would generate revenue and most importantly, provide affordable summer sports camp experiences for youth throughout Defiance County.

It is also the intent of Defiance College to create a **“Run and Read” Academic Program** offering to middle school and high school children on campus during the summer camps, to interject

academic programming with the sports activities during the camp. This innovative program would be funded through Defiance College and the City with support from local businesses and donors.

Finally, the College also envisions opening its renovated outdoor and indoor athletic complex to the Defiance YMCA and its youth, to allow the YMCA to expand its athletic service offerings to its membership. The Defiance YMCA has some modest indoor recreation activities to offer youth in the Region, but no outdoor sports facilities to allow youth to participate in track and field; soccer; volleyball, basketball; or other indoor and outdoor sports opportunities.

O Long-Overdue Upgrade of Athletic Facilities at Defiance College as Stimulus for Increased Enrollment and Defiance Student Opportunities

As stated earlier, Defiance College is a primary economic development engine in the City of Defiance and in Defiance County. The College is the fifth largest employer in the region and has an estimated economic impact of over \$50,000,000 annually on the local economy of Defiance, Ohio. Its growth and financial stability are essential to the students that it serves and the City that benefits from its direct and indirect financial contribution to the region.

In an historic initiative taken by the College and its Board of Trustees, in order to enhance affordability and accessibility to higher education, on October 16th the College announced the rollout of the “DEFine Your Future” program, which features **a reduction in annual tuition by 25 percent, from \$37,978 to \$28,500**, effective in the fall of the 2024-25 academic year. Also included within the DEFine Your Future program for incoming students is the optional Defiance College Advantage Plan—a loan repayment assistance program, that ensures the repayment of student loans for those who graduate from the college and earn less than \$45,000 in their first professional position. These recent changes are of National significance and offer exciting opportunities for current and future Defiance College students to come to Defiance to study and participate in a wider range of academic and athletic initiatives. Also, importantly, on Friday, October 6, 2023 Defiance College announced its move to the NAIA for athletic governance which will allow Defiance College to offer athletic scholarships to student athletes who need financial assistance to attend college in Defiance, Ohio.

These Nationally-significant changes demonstrate clearly that Defiance College has embarked upon an historic, vigorous, innovative effort to increase its overall enrollment to 1,000 students within 3 years—nearly double its current full-time student population. There is great optimism and data-driven initiatives underway at Defiance College that the College firmly believes will reinforce its preeminent position as the academic -- and economic-- center of the region.

The College has a proud history of athletic achievement and has one of the highest percentages of minority students and student athletes among all colleges and universities in the State of Ohio.

At the same time, in order to sustain this transformational rise in enrollment and continued high academic achieving students will require, among other things, a systemic upgrade of its antiquated outdoor track and field; soccer; and indoor athletic facilities—facilities that have not undergone any significant upgrade in decades.

In addition, to keep pace with the projected historic rise in new student enrollment at Defiance College, including student athlete enrollment, the appropriation being sought will also allow the College to transform one of its major indoor sports complexes—the Smart Center— with a reconfiguration of its track infield to accommodate 4 new indoor volleyball and basketball courts, and a modified youth soccer field. Most emphatically, these innovative uses of space in this major athletic building will also be a significant catalyst for attracting high school and other youth league volleyball and basketball tournaments to participate in major events in the winter months and throughout the summer sports camp season.

Data-driven analysis of the renovation and upgrade of the College's track and field facilities alone, would immediately trigger an increase in student athlete enrollment of as many as **120 new full-time track and field student athletes, and an overall 300-400** net new student enrollment increase that will lead the way toward achieving the College's three-year goal of attracting a total of 1,000 full time students to the college, starting in 2025.

This direct connection between the refurbishment of Defiance College athletic facilities and increased enrollment will help to solidify the College financial structure, and ensure that the College remains one of the most important economic anchors in the City, in Defiance County and throughout the Region.

The concept of upgrading local athletic/recreation facilities and forging partnerships with local non-profit entities is not new. In fact, the following projects, among others, were specifically approved by the House of Representatives; the U.S. Senate; and the President, through Community Project Funding and Congressionally-Directed Spending approved in fiscal year 2023:

- **City of Los Angeles Park Ballfield Improvements and Upgrades \$4,000,000;**
- **Burns Valley Sports Complex and Recreation Center \$2,000,000;**
- **Community and Recreation Center Construction Project in New London, Connecticut \$2,000,000;**
- **Phase 2 Simonhoff Floral Park Improvements COVID 19 Memorial and Douglas Park Community Center Improvements, City of Miami Parks and Recreation Department \$4,000,000;**
- **Expanding Access to Recreation New Fields, Soccer in the Streets, Inc. \$1,000,000;**

- **Veterans Memorial Youth League Complex Park Improvements City of Perth Amboy, NJ \$1,500,000;**
- **Schneider Park Revitalization Project, Toledo Football Academy, Ohio \$1,381,000**
- **Hammond Avenue Baseball Fields Astroturf ad Sports Lighting Renovation, PA \$500,000;**
- **Hampton County Recreation Complex Hampton Count, SC \$3,000,000;**
- **Memphis Cobblestone Landing Recreational Center, City of Memphis \$4,000,000;**
- **Restore the Gardner Park Grandstand and Ballfield \$500,000; and;**

In summary, the synergy with the City, the Mayor and his professional staff, with the renovation of Defiance College athletic assets would cement a solid sports and recreation ‘town gown’ and ‘sports tourism’ partnership, to grow the local economy; attract youth travel sports teams to Defiance, including; tournaments; track meets; and other athletic events from throughout the State of Ohio and neighboring state of Indiana.

In doing so, the updated facilities and increased utilization from youth teams will stimulate additional revenues to local Defiance businesses, as these youth teams come to Defiance to compete and enjoy the City. And as stated above, the combination of these athletic facility upgrades and modifications at Defiance College will contribute dramatically to the College’s three-year plans to bolster enrollment, attract more high-achieving students, especially minority students, to the College and reinforce the College’s preeminent place in the economy of Defiance, Ohio and the County.

For the reasons stated above, the City believes that the appropriation of \$2,771,000 that we are requesting constitutes an innovative, cost-effective, economic development project investment that will increase youth athletic opportunities, increase the financial underpinnings of the fifth largest employer in our area, in Defiance College; and stimulate additional economic benefits for Defiance businesses.

**V: *SPECIFIC PROJECT COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORTS CENTER AT
DEFIANCE COLLEGE***

The College and the City have done a thorough strategic analysis of the specific athletic facility upgrades that will have the most significant impact on: (1) stimulating increased economic activity and development in Defiance, Ohio; (2) its ability to offer world-class facilities to stimulate increased youth sports program opportunities for Defiance City and County youth in

coordination with the Mayor, the Director of Parks and Recreation, and other leaders in the City of Defiance; and (3) strengthening the growth and financial strength of the major economic engine for Defiance – Defiance College—and its ability to grow enrollment and solidify its economic preeminence in the region.

The City and the College leadership both believe that the following specific athletic facility upgrades and modifications will achieve these objectives, including stimulating a dramatic increase in youth and their teams from other parts of Ohio and from bordering states, traveling with their families, coaches, and fans, to Defiance throughout the year to participate in tournaments, track meets, soccer competition, and indoor volleyball and basketball competition.

Upgrade of Track and Field Facilities

The track and field facilities have not undergone renovation nor upgrade since they were installed at Defiance College. This has led to a significant impediment for the College to host track and field events in its own athletic conference not to mention hosting Defiance high school, middle school league events or youth track meets with athletes from within the City; and from outside of the City, the County and the State. The upgrades would include renovation of the main track inside the football stadium; the long-jump facilities; shot put, discus and javelin space—all done to help ensure that facilities are safe for youth participation, are compliant with NAIA requirements; and are of sufficient scope to accommodate local, State and National youth sport championship opportunities and summer camps for youth in the region.

As stated earlier, just this component of the Center plan alone, is projected to increase enrollment of student athletes at Defiance College by **as many as 120 new full-time track and field student athletes, and an overall 300-400** net new student enrollment, starting in 2025.

To these ends, in order to provide world class track and field athletic opportunities for youth in our region, the State and from bordering states, funding for a major upgrade of the Defiance College track and field complex is a key component of the City-College Community Youth Sports Center initiative: ----- **\$1,300,000**

Overhaul Existing Grass Soccer Match Field and Adjoining Soccer Field

The grass soccer match field and practice field have not been upgraded **for decades**. The request for funding would allow for a full upgrade to these facilities that would be important components of youth sports participation and summer camps at Defiance College. These first-ever upgrades will allow for the upgrade of the existing, large grass practice field area; establishment of two (2) youth game fields on the practice field; and a total reconstruction of the primary college match pitch and championship field for the College, for youth tournament finals, and playoff competition in the Region.

An annual enhanced maintenance program for these important grass fields will be borne by the College going forward beyond the specific appropriations requested from Congress, to ensure sustainability of the upgrade covered in this funding request:

----- **\$606,000**

Installation of Bathroom Facilities and Water Stations Near Ballfields

Currently the only restroom facilities for men and women in the Defiance College athletic complex is inside the football stadium. This limited availability of bathroom facilities is not conducive to either existing college sports activities at the College nor, more importantly, to hosting youth athletic teams and their family members from the City, the County or from out of State. This fundamental resource is essential to solidify the health and safety of youth who come to the College to participate in tournaments, track meets and summer camps. It is proposed to utilize a portion of the appropriation sought to install a bathroom facility and water station outside of the football stadium, to accommodate boys and girls and their families who will be on campus for athletic events throughout the year and during summer camps. -----

----- **\$375,000**

Installation of Taraflex® Movable Flooring for Indoor Volleyball, Basketball, Soccer Youth Play in Smart Center

To provide unique opportunities for Defiance youth to participate in three major sports during the winter months and at summer camps, a portion of the appropriation request would be used to install four (4) indoor volleyball/basketball courts and a small-sided soccer space on the infield of the Smart Center indoor track complex.

A Taraflex® or similar movable floor technology would be deployed that could allow for interchangeable set ups for youth volleyball and basketball play, and to attract out of town youth tournaments, playoffs, and summer camp opportunities.

As an example of the economic impact of this component of the request, Defiance College – and the City--lost the opportunity to host 300 high school volleyball tournament athletes and their families over 6 weeks because of lack of such indoor volleyball facilities. With the new surface modification and installation of regulation volleyball/basketball courts, the City of Defiance and the College will be able to aggressively pursue out of town youth travel team tournaments, bringing new business to Defiance hotels, restaurants and other retail establishments to increase their business revenues annually.

These facilities would also be available to the Defiance YMCA to help provide new sports opportunities for the youth that this important non-profit organization serves in the City of Defiance. ----- **\$490,000**

TOTAL REQUEST: ----- \$2,771,000

VI: SUSTAINABILITY OF DEFIANCE, OHIO COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORTS CENTER INITIATIVES

Defiance College will take on the near-term and long-term responsibility for maintaining the upgraded facilities, including the track and field complex; the soccer match and practice fields; and the proposed Smart Center track infield removable court facility once it is installed. This will involve regular maintenance of surfaces and seeding, fertilizing, aerating, and mowing the soccer fields and grass areas of the track and field complex.

A Working Group, co-chaired by the City’s leadership team and the Director of Athletics at Defiance College will be formed to collaborate on all aspects of the project, including joint marketing efforts to bring youth sports teams to Defiance to utilize these newly-upgraded and modified athletic facilities. The Working Group will also maintain a data base of increased business coming to the area; enrollment increases and benchmarks on enrollment at the College; and the operation and maintenance cycles for each of the upgraded athletic facilities addressed in this proposal. The Working Group will also help to ensure that all HUD requirements are met and adhered to throughout the process of upgrading the facilities, including the conduct of the environmental assessment that is required by HUD for Community Development projects, prior to the release of Community Project or Congressionally-directed spending appropriations.

In addition, the College is committed to the vigorous pursuit of corporate sponsorships for not only the facilities to be upgraded, but for forthcoming tournaments, track meets, and other youth sports activities, including summer camps, at the College.

The City and the College are equally committed to pursuing ‘scholarships’ for economically challenged families that will allow them to send their sons or daughters to summer camps at the College.

Finally, the College is committed to providing the in-house instructional resources to implement the summer **“Run and Read”** Academic program to provide academic learning opportunities for children approaching their graduation from high school and college admission cycle.

###