

**Ohio Senate**  
**Senate Finance Committee**

April 10, 2018

Proponent Testimony on HB 246

Witness: Susan Lewis Kaylor, President & CEO  
St. Vincent Family Center

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB 246.

My name is Susan Lewis Kaylor, and I represent St. Vincent Family Center. St. Vincent Family Center is one of Ohio's most experienced and skilled child behavioral health treatment centers, helping 3,000 families a year. For over 140 years, we've expertly tended to the unmet needs of children and families throughout central Ohio, offering an array of customized counseling and behavioral health programs. More specifically, St. Vincent Prep Academy is our full-service school designed to support preschool and elementary students who are unable to maintain successfully in a traditional school setting due to behavioral health challenges. Combining academics and family-centered behavioral health care, our approach prepares young students with the social-emotional skills they need to succeed upon returning to their original school environment.

I am here to testify as a proponent on SB 246, the SAFE Act: Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education. The legislation would limit out of school suspensions and expulsions for children pre-kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, encourage the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and instructs teachers on classroom strategies to deal with and reduce disruptive behaviors.

At St. Vincent Family Center, many of our student referrals come to us from educators and school administrators who have exhausted their current resources and are unsure of how to effectively support students with behavioral challenges. More than half of the families receiving our behavioral healthcare services at St. Vincent's are living in Columbus' poorest zip codes. As a result, we encounter children each day who are coping with the lived experience of trauma: abuse and neglect, parent incarceration, exposure to addiction and drug and alcohol abuse, parent absenteeism due to divorce, death, unemployment, hunger, and homelessness. These adverse experiences lead to disruptive behaviors in the classroom and significantly impair a child's ability to thrive in school and in life. As educators and advocates for the health and wellbeing of these little ones, we must shift our thinking from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" These are children who need extra attention and individual support, and to remain in the safe and emotionally stable environment that their school should be. Their behavior is a cry for help for quality mental health care that can address those issues before they become more pronounced and begin a trajectory of failure at school and in the community.

This bill promotes positive behaviors in school and would prepare teachers to manage challenging behaviors in the classroom in ways that allow the student to continue to learn. The bill expands the

availability of mental health services and supports for students and their families, so that when a student presents with these behaviors, they can be appropriately addressed at the earliest possible time. We have seen the impact of early intervention firsthand at St. Vincent Family Center, and it is remarkable. Ninety-seven percent of our preschoolers and 93% of our elementary students achieve key milestones and transition successfully back into their community schools and preschools. By implementing positive behavior management strategies in the classroom and addressing the foundational challenges these children have faced- the “what happened to you”- young students are able to heal and learn the skills they need to manage their own success in an academic setting. And preparing these students early has a profound effect on the trajectory of their lives ahead. Research shows us that children encouraged early in life with quality support and programming not only improves educational performance, but further increases their likelihood of evolving into stable, successful members of society. Simply put, this bill addresses the cycle of poverty by keeping very young students with disciplinary concerns in the classroom where they can continue to learn and receive the help they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 246. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.