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State Senator Jay Hottinger, Majority Whip  
Senate Bill 6 Sponsor Testimony  
Ohio House Health Committee  
May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Senate Bill 6.

This legislation is inspired by the work of a unique charitable organization known as Safe Families for Children that is already serving families right here in Ohio. The Safe Families program allows a parent in a crisis situation to temporarily request that their children be hosted by a fully screened and vetted “host family” for a specific, limited period of time. The host family provides a temporary place for children to stay and give parents peace of mind so they can focus on getting back on their feet. The goal of the program is to strengthen and preserve biological families in a natural, community-focused way that is free from the stress and red-tape of government.

This legislation defines a qualified organization, creates standards for background checks of host families, and permits placements in the following situations involving one or both parents:

- incarceration
- incapacitation
- medical, psychiatric, or psychological treatment
- military service
- other appropriate circumstances

In addition, Senate Bill 6 clarifies that a child placed in a home pursuant to this program shall not be deemed abandoned. Existing law regarding what constitutes abandonment made no exception for programs such as these, and this law provides an avenue to rebut that presumption of abandonment. A parent should never be punished for making this brave decision in the best interest of their child.

I’d like to thank the Ohio Judicial Conference and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio for their assistance in ensuring this legislation, while providing flexibility for parents, maintains robust protections for those kids involved. The Department of Jobs and Family Services also provided key input on what best practice procedures should be covered with host families, codifying background check standards,

and sharpening the distinction between host family agreements and foster care. These measures will provide the parents utilizing these programs with peace of mind while they take responsible steps to support their families. Senate Bill 6 passed unanimously through committee and on the floor in the Senate, and I would respectfully ask for your support.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for your time, and now I will turn the microphone over to Senator Hottinger who will share his own personal connection to such programs.