

Sponsor Testimony: **House Bill 405, Family Forward Act**

State Representative Jon Cross, 83rd Ohio House District

December 11th, 2019

Representative Cross:

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, I am excited to introduce and provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 405 – the Family Forward Initiative. I want to thank Treasurer Robert Sprague for bringing this program to me and allowing me to sponsor this important legislation.

There is a pressing and constant need for families to adopt children in Ohio. While many families may want to adopt a child, the adoption process can be long and difficult. Not only is it a time-consuming journey, but also an expensive one. According to the Department of Job and Family Services website, adoptions in Ohio can range from \$10,000-\$50,000 depending on the circumstances surrounding the adoption. Many Ohio families who wish to adopt may be delayed or deterred by these burdensome costs. Due to the complex and unpredictable nature of the adoption process, it can be difficult for families to adequately plan for expenses through every step of the process.

To help address this need, I am introducing legislation that will assist Ohio families looking to adopt, by offering reduced interest rate loans for adoption-related costs. The loan would be up to \$50,000 and available as a line of credit for a five-year term, with the option to extend for an additional five years. The loan opportunity would be made available through the Linked Deposit program, which is housed in the Treasurer of State's office, and available to individuals at qualifying financial institutions.

Existing linked deposit loan programs include Ag-Link, ECO-Link, GrowNOW, and ReEnergize Ohio. The Family Forward initiative would function similarly: families would apply for the loan at their local lending institution, once the loan is approved, the Treasurer's office deposits funds with the lending institution at a below market rate. The lending institution then passes the interest savings on to the borrowers via a reduced interest rate. The loan operates as a line of credit for a period of five years (with an option to extend for another five years).

This concept is designed to assist individuals who are seeking to grow their families through adoption. By providing a more flexible financing option for adoptions, we will be helping to build stronger families and unite children with loving homes. Please join me in providing a bridge for Ohio's families wanting to adopt. Not only will the lower interest rate result in savings for families, but Family Forward loans will help families meet and manage immediate adoption-related costs prior to receiving the adoption tax credit.

House Bill 405 can remove financial barriers and help ease the financial burden that often inhibit the adoption process. The adoption process should be a celebration of life, love, and family, and this bill can help Ohioans secure funding needed to start the adoption process.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions.