



Testimony on HB 166
Allocation for Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Brandi Slaughter, Chief Executive Officer

April 10, 2019

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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166, which creates the State Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Operating Budget. I am Brandi Slaughter. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer at Voices for Ohio's Children, a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization, focused on improving the well-being of children in our state.

Children in Foster Care

Voices for Ohio's Children commends Governor DeWine's investment in children, with a special focus on children who are either in the foster care system or at risk of entering that system.

- All children deserve caring families, whether they be kin, foster or adoptive. Voices supports the \$8.5 million in the budget to support struggling grandparents and other kin care providers who unexpectedly find themselves caring for children, investments to expand the kinship navigator programs and dollars to improve the recruitment of foster parents;
- The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a pivotal developmental stage as young people learn the skills needed to be healthy and productive adults. This process can be complicated for youth with foster care experience. Research recently released from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's in its report *Fostering Youth Transitions* shows that young adults who experienced foster care have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of spectrums – from education to employment to housing to early parenthood. Ohio is working to improve the practices, programs and policies that help ensure these young people have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need for well-being and success. One program is the Bridges program which supports youth as they grow into adulthood. We support the full funding of the program which we expect to improve the outcomes of these transition age youth.
- Ohio ranks dead last in our state investment into the child welfare system. This system is on the front lines of protecting our most vulnerable children and is experiencing increased caseloads as result of the opioid epidemic.



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Voices supports the increase to the state's child protective allocation by \$30 million per year for a total of \$90 million annually to support the system. This is long overdue.

- Voices advocated strongly for the passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act before Congress. As this is a large policy change for the child welfare system, we support an allocation to ODJFS to support its readiness to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act which aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment and in-home parenting skill training.

Affording Quality Child Care

In order to secure a subsidy for child care, a family cannot have income that exceeds 130% of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, this is \$33,475, the equivalent of one breadwinner working full time for \$16/hour. In Ohio, child care at an accredited child care center is over \$12,000 annually for an infant to \$9,200 annually for a four year old. Without a subsidy, a family pays the first \$5.76 each hour paying for infant childcare at an accredited child care center. This simply is not feasible for poor working families, shifting the burden of care to poorly paid or unpaid family caregivers.

Ohio's eligibility level is third lowest in the country and is at 40% of the Ohio median income. The median state sets its eligibility at 55% of the median income. We urge you to put additional child care dollars into the budget and include language raise the application income ceiling to 150% of the federal poverty level.

Accurate Census Count

When we miss young children in the census, it has serious consequences for them, their families, their communities and our nation—with many of those consequences lasting for at least 10 years. Researchers believe that up to 2 million children under the age of 5 could be missed in the count, for a variety of reasons. Roughly 300

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use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion in funding annually, including nearly \$160 billion just on programs for children. Undercounting kids would put these federal dollars at risk, leading to underfunded programs that are critical for family stability and opportunity. Voices supports funds to be allocated to form a State Complete Count committee to ensure that Ohio is ready for the Census Count in 2020.

Chairman Romanchuk and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

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