



Testimony of Ed Cohn, President and CEO

House Bill 64—May 20th, 2015

Chairman Beagle, Vice Chair Williams and members of the Senate Finance Workforce Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64. My name is Ed Cohn and I am President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio. I am here on behalf of the Ohio statewide association of Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies. After 25 years in banking, the last 13 as a bank President, I retired from banking more than 10 years ago to commit 100% of my time to helping our youth.

In House Bill 59, the previous operating budget, the General Assembly added an amendment that provided funding for the Big Brothers Big Sisters AMACHI Ohio program. This program provides mentoring services for children of incarcerated parents. AMACHI is a Nigerian word which means, “Who knows but what God has brought us through this child.”

While this is an untracked demographic, it is estimated there are more than 56,000 kids in Ohio with at least one parent in jail. Studies have shown that these kids are twice as likely to engage in antisocial behavior and end up in prison themselves. Providing these kids with a mentor can help them cope with having an incarcerated parent and it can also ease the transition once that parent is released.

Independent national research conducted by top researchers in the field of mentoring proves that mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters positively impacts children’s lives. The Ohio children served by AMACHI are no exception. Using Big Brothers Big Sisters’ proven Program Outcome Evaluation, 80% of the youth served in the AMACHI program Ohio showed improvement on over half of the 21 development assets measured, with the following noteworthy results:

- 86% improved in their self-confidence
- 77% improved in their ability to make decisions
- 74% improved in their academic performance
- 74% improved in their relationship with other adults
- 72% improved in their sense of the future

One alumni AMACHI Little Brother from Butler County, Calvin, says, “having a Big Brother allowed me to believe it was okay to follow a different path than the one set before me by my circumstances. And one Alumni AMACHI Little Sister from Franklin County, Kanisha, says, “I am very grateful that I have a mentor to show me the way to where I want to go and what I need to do to get there.” Calvin and Kanisha are two of more than 4,000 Ohio children of incarcerated parents who have been mentored through AMACHI since the program began.

In House Bill 59, the previous state operating budget, the Senate added funding for AMACHI in the amount of \$1 million per fiscal year. These funds were appropriated from line item 600410, TANF State/Maintenance of Effort, which is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. This funding allowed more than 900 matches to be made statewide over the biennium.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio acts as the fiscal agent and clearinghouse for AMACHI funding. Matches are made across the state, and the funds are distributed to local Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies as those matches are made. This creates a very effective statewide program with no duplication of administrative costs so maximum funding goes to the kids and families we serve. We are very appreciative of your support for AMACHI and this very vulnerable population.

We are seeking an amendment to House Bill 64 to reauthorize these funds for another two years. This will result in 952 new matches over the biennium, funded for an average match length of 18 months. I want to be clear about that point – the matches that were made over the last two years will be sustained from separate funds and the funds from House Bill 64 will only be used for new matches.

In closing, I’d like to read you part of a letter that we received from a father imprisoned at Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell, Ohio.

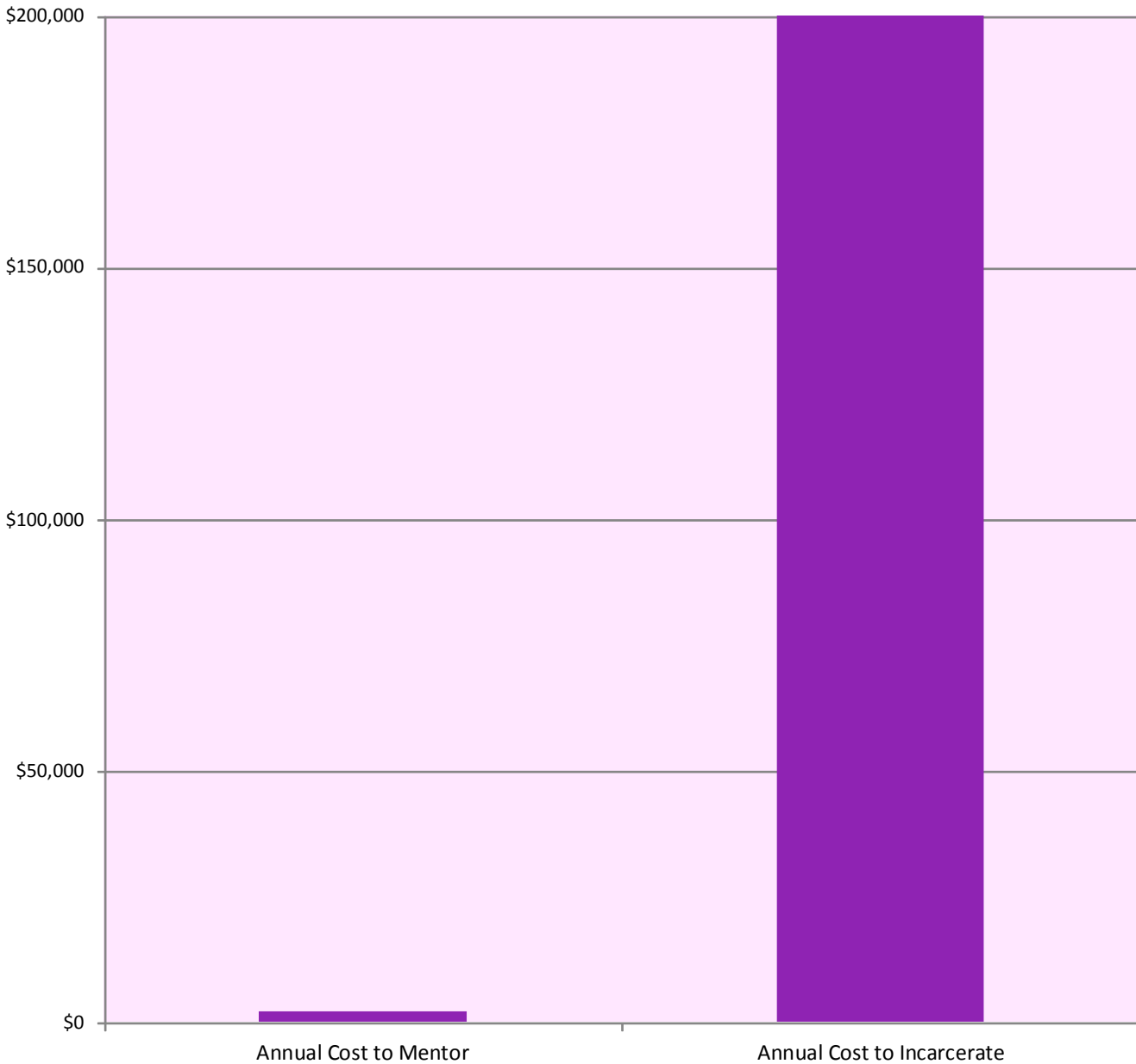
“My oldest two, Averie and Addison, are having a hard time with my absence,” he says, “and I think this is a perfect opportunity for them. They have been acting out and are starting to struggle at school. Please see if my babies fit the criteria for your mentorship program.”

We are requesting funding because we are committed to serving this population through our AMACHI program. AMACHI not only allows us to keep youth like this prisoner’s children out of prison and on the right track, but it also avoids much greater costs down the road. Mentoring a child for one year costs less than \$2,000, while incarcerating a juvenile often exceeds \$202,000 annually. The positive outcomes that come from Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are dramatic and well documented through extensive research, and they bring great savings to the state in the long run.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today, for all of your support and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Amachi Ohio: A Solid Investment

Amachi helps keep vulnerable youth out of prison and on the right track, and it also avoids much greater costs down the road. Mentoring a child for a year costs less than \$2,000 while incarcerating a juvenile in Ohio often exceeds \$202,000 annually!



Amachi Ohio: Proven Results

Research proves that mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters positively impacts children's lives, and the children served by Big Brothers Big Sisters Amachi Ohio are no exception. Using Big Brothers Big Sisters' proven Program Outcome Evaluation, **80% of the youth served in the Amachi Ohio program showed improvement on over half of the 21 developmental assets measured**, with the following noteworthy results:

- 86% improved in their self-confidence
- 82% improved in their ability to express their feelings
- 77% improved in their ability to make decisions
- 74% improved in their academic performance
- 74% improved in their relationship with other adults
- 72% improved in their sense of the future
- 71% improved in their attitude toward school

In an independent, experimental national study, positive relationships between children in our programs and their Big Brothers and Big Sisters had a direct and measurable impact on children's lives. Researchers found that after 18 months of spending time with their mentors, **Little Brothers and Sisters, compared to children not in the program, were 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 52% less likely to skip school and 32% less likely to hit someone.** They were also more confident in their performance in schoolwork and getting along better with their families.¹

In addition, a 2013 national, independent, experimental research study validated the benefits of Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs for at-risk and high-risk youth. The study documented that mentoring benefited youth's emotional/psychological well-being, peer relationships, academic attitudes, and grades. Youth participants reported:

- **Fewer depressive symptoms**
- **Greater acceptance by their peers**
- **More positive beliefs about their ability to succeed in school**
- **Better grades in school**

The study was the first of its kind to differentiate between at-risk and "higher-risk" youth, such as youth with an incarcerated parent, and found that the benefits of mentoring were very similar for both groups of youth.²

¹ Tierney, Joseph P., Grossman, Jean Baldwin, and Resch, Nancy L. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*. Public/Private Ventures. 1995.

² Herrera, Carla, DuBois, David L., and Grossman, Jean Baldwin. *The Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles*. A Public/Private Ventures project distributed by MDRC, 2013.



Little Brother Kavontae and Big Brother Calvin



Alumni Amachi Little Brother Calvin's experience as a Little Brother motivated him to become an Amachi Big Brother through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County now that he is an adult. His Little Brother is also the son of an incarcerated parent. Calvin says that being exposed to another family system outside of his own household helped him expand his horizons and taught him that other paths existed in life.

"Having a Big Brother," says Calvin, "allowed me to believe it was okay to follow a different path than the one set before me by my circumstances."



Little Sister Kanisha and Big Sister Jacci



Amachi Little Sister Kanisha was matched with Big Sister Jacci in Franklin County when Kanisha was 13 years old. Kanisha's mother was incarcerated when she was 14, and she has been raised by her aunt. Big Sister Jacci was by Kanisha's side through high school graduation and continues to be an important person in her life. Kanisha is currently going into her junior year at University of Cincinnati, studying biology and planning to become a doctor.

Kanisha says, "I am very grateful that I have a mentor to show me the way to where I want to go and what I need to do to get there."

Little Brother Zack and Big Brother James



Amachi Little Brother James has a lot in common with his Big Brother Zack, including being a straight-A student who just can't seem to sit still. They were matched by Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Central Ohio in New Philadelphia. James, whose father has been incarcerated through most of his match with Zack, is looking forward to Zack teaching him to drive and helping him choose a college. He credits Zack with teaching him to be patient, set goals and work hard.

James is clear about what their relationship means to him: "Zack is my family," he says, "No one can replace that."

Little Sister Molly and Big Sister Cheryl



At the age of 11, Amachi Little Sister Molly has already faced challenges that many will never have to deal with in a lifetime. Because of parental incarceration, she is being raised by her grandmother. She is also matched with Big Sister, Cheryl, in Lorain County.

In Cheryl's words, "I try to be a positive influence in Molly's life. We do fun, positive activities. I always tell Molly not to dwell on her circumstances. She can change her story. I tell her she can be whatever she wants to be."