



Chairman Hackett, Ranking Member Tavares, and Members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49. My name is Elizabeth Martinez, and I am the 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. The purpose of my testimony is to request TANF funding in the amount of \$1 million per fiscal year for mentoring children in trauma, including children who suffer from parental incarceration.

There is precedent for this request. In the last operating budget, House Bill 64, the General Assembly included an amendment that provided \$1 million of funding over the FY16/17 biennium for Big Brothers Big Sisters' Amachi program, which provides mentoring services for children of incarcerated parents. As a direct result of the FY16/17 funding, 476 Ohio children of incarcerated parents will have been matched on a one-to-one basis with a caring mentor. However, the funding level in House Bill 64 was *only half* of the \$1 million/year funding that was provided to Big Brothers Big Sisters in the previous biennial budget. While we are most grateful for your support in the last operating budget, let me assure the needs continue to grow.

Approximately 10% of Ohio kids (271,000 children) have experienced parental incarceration. Studies have shown that these kids are **twice** as likely to engage in antisocial behavior and end up in prison themselves. Providing them with a mentor can help them cope with having an incarcerated parent and ease the transition once that parent is released. The children who participated in our Amachi program last year demonstrated positive outcomes. Using Big Brothers Big Sisters' **proven** Youth Outcome Survey, 97% of the youth improved in one of eight major categories we measure, and 82% improved in at least two.

Parental incarceration is a traumatic experience in a child's life. Unfortunately, there are many additional forms of trauma that are experienced by children facing adversity in Ohio:

- 25% of Ohio children have experienced two or more adverse experiences (family violence, parental divorce, socioeconomic hardship, etc.);
- 29% have parents who lack secure employment; and
- 22% live in households that have been food insecure

It cannot be overstated enough that these children are at *risk for initiating opioid and drug abuse, and becoming incarcerated themselves*. Providing them with a mentor can, among other benefits, help them:

- develop social and emotional competencies;
- increase their attachment to school and community;
- develop a sense of future beyond that of their current family situation/status; and,
- strengthen their academics, and stay on track to become successful adults.

Independent national research proves that children who participate in Big Brothers Big Sisters' programs are 46% less likely to initiate drug use, 52% less likely to skip school and 33% less likely to hit someone.

Big Brothers Big Sisters provides consistent, stable, one-to-one mentoring relationships to children experiencing trauma, and our professional staff supports every child, family and mentor throughout the entire match relationship. This staff involvement is called “match support”. We have data that shows that the longer the match, the better the outcomes. Our unique, intentional match support by BBBS, sets our mentoring program apart from other models, including group programs offered by well-respected programs such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Junior Achievement and City Year.

In light of our history of strong outcomes and demonstrated ability to funnel state dollars directly to children and families who need them, in House Bill 49, we are seeking an amendment to renew the \$1 million/year funding we received in the FY14/15 budget. Over the FY18/19 biennium, this funding would allow Big Brothers Big Sisters to provide mentors to 880 additional children who have experienced trauma in their lives, including those who have experienced parental incarceration, and support those mentoring matches for 21 months. Specifically, we are requesting \$1 million in each fiscal year from the TANF Block Grant (Fund 3V60). The agency I lead, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio, will continue to act as the fiscal agent for this statewide funding. The funds will continue to be distributed to local Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies as matches are made. We have created a very effective statewide program with no duplication of administrative costs, allowing maximum funding to go to the children and families we serve.

In northeast Ohio, Little Sister Courtney has experienced the benefits of this program firsthand. When she was matched with her Big Sister Shannon Majewski, Courtney’s father was incarcerated. Later, her mother had issues with drug abuse and was also incarcerated for some time. With Shannon at her side, Courtney is growing up into a successful young woman. Currently a high school junior, she has consistently been on the honor roll and is taking college preparatory courses at her local community college. Courtney says, “Over these past eight years, Shannon has truly changed my life for the better. She has shown me how to be a strong, smart and thoughtful person. She has always been there for me when I needed her and always reminds me that she will be.” In closing, I would like to read you part of a letter that we received from a father imprisoned at Nobel 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 \$1 million/year of funding to help children who are experiencing trauma in their lives because we are committed to serving them. As a state, how can we ignore children like Courtney, Averie and Addison, who through no fault of their own, have experienced trauma that is proven to have a negative impact on their entire life, and possibly lead to opioid addiction and involvement with the juvenile justice system? By providing the *right* intervention at the *right* time, Big Brothers Big Sisters keeps youth on the *right* track, and also avoids much greater costs down the road. Mentoring a child for one year costs \$2,268, while incarcerating a juvenile often exceeds \$202,000 annually. The positive outcomes that come from Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are dramatic, and they bring great savings to the state in the long run.

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