



SHEPHERDING THE NEXT GENERATION

COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

OHIO

Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chairman Huffman, and Ranking Member Thomas,

My name is Adam Will and I am the pastor of Mount Hermon United Brethren Church in Pomeroy, Ohio. I have lived in southeast Ohio for 34 years, and have served as a minister for the last 14 years. I also am serving my 12th year as a member of the Eastern Local (Meigs) Board of Education. In addition to all this, I am a husband and father of three young children. The many hats I wear give me, in my opinion, a unique and wide-ranging perspective on issues that affect children and families.

As a pastor and ministry leader in our great state of Ohio, I have seen the devastating effects of child abuse and neglect up close. Pastors take Biblical mandates seriously and are committed to caring for and speaking out on behalf of children living in at-risk circumstances.

The book of Proverbs 31:8 commands us to “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable”

Today I am testifying in support of strengthening Help Me Grow voluntary home visiting programs for at-risk first time mothers, high quality child care, and children’s services such as foster care and kinship caregiving.

Pastors work with our congregations to make a difference for Christ and to strengthen the flock, our families and children. Yet every year, there are roughly 700,000 confirmed cases of abuse or neglect in the United States, including nearly 20,000 in Ohio. The need for home visiting mentorship for at-risk parents, child care for working parents, and children’s services for at-risk kids is outpacing the faith communities’ ability to respond.

Help Me Grow provides nurses or other trained professionals who work closely with the parents to develop a path toward success. This includes coaching on how to “baby-proof” a home and what to expect during pregnancy. It also includes mentorship on how parents can reach their career goals and become more financially stable, whether through education or job-training. These programs have been research-proven to promote better health for the children, more financial independence for the parents, and more academic success for both generations.

Proverbs commands us to “Train up a child in the way they should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” We have a crisis in child care in the US, recently estimated to cost families and communities \$57 billion a year in lost wages, lost business opportunity and lost taxes. While there is strong support in our population for

a parent to be home raising children full-time, family and economic realities often make that difficult or impossible. When it is required, high-quality options are best positioned to support families and children to reach their God-given potential. Recent Federal legislation has improved Ohio's ability to offer high-quality early care and education to working parents who need it most.

Another unfortunate effect of the opioid crisis is the decimation of the family. It is robbing children of parental love and support, leading to abuse and neglect of children, and placing foster care systems and kinship caregivers under more duress. We support increased investments in these programs as they give kids another chance to get the support they need to develop into productive adults capable of working in a career which affords them the opportunity to support and raise strong families of their own.

Very importantly, these programs can reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Children who survive abuse or neglect carry the emotional scars for life, and are almost 30 percent more likely to commit a violent crime when they get older, exposing more to people to this cycle of suffering.

Together, we can help lift up Ohio children and families.