



Ohio House of Representatives  
House Finance Committee  
Testimony on HB110  
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Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 110. My name is Chip Spinning, Executive Director for Franklin County Children Services. Before I begin, I want to express my sincere appreciation to Governor DeWine and the General Assembly for the historic children services funding increase in the current biennial budget.

I have been a director for over 20 years. The first half, I was in Madison County, a small county without a Children Services levy, and now I am in Franklin county, a large county with a levy. In Madison, I worked with 50 team members. Now I work with 850 team members. While there are differences between the two counties, we have far more in common than not when it comes to serving children and families.

First: Big or small, we all have significant challenges in the ability to recruit, hire, train, and most importantly retain a highly skilled, diverse work force to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. We have implemented many strategies to address these challenges, but the most innovative is developing a culture of safety.

The child protection system is not different than other highly complex systems that have applied safety science to improve outcomes and developed cultures of safety. The nuclear industry, airlines, and healthcare systems have all developed safety cultures to improve safety outcomes. These highly complex systems must reliably perform nearly 100% of the time because errors can be catastrophic, much like child welfare. The goal is to develop a culture in which team members are no longer targets of blame but are acknowledged as experts, protectors, and co-creators of safe and reliable systems that consistently examine and reexamine opportunities to improve outcomes and avert tragedies.

The second thing that we have in common is that we serve all children, not just abused and neglected children, but also those who have been failed by other systems including behavioral health, education, juvenile justice, and developmental disabilities. Great strides have been made to collectively serve these multi-system youth and we appreciate that the current MSY investment in the Medicaid budget has been increased and that the ODJFS budget investment remains. We are hopeful, but we still have a long way to go.

Third, more than ever before, we lack placements options for youth. Our cases are open much longer due mainly to addiction the complex needs of the children and families we serve and the delay in permanency caused by the pandemic.

So, what does all this mean? In October, Ohio will implement the Family First Prevention Services Act, which aims to prevent children from entering foster care and encourages reduced reliance on institutional settings when youth do have to be removed from their homes. To implement Family First, we must provide families with prevention services that prevent youth from entering the children services system.

Placing children with kin reduces the trauma associated with removal and ensures better outcomes. It allows them to maintain community connections and participate in activities. Since 2015, there has been a 22% percent shift in placement days from substitute care to kinship care. At our agency, we have been able to double the number of youth in kinship care over the past several years. FCCS provides financial and material support including monthly stipends, childcare assistance, summer programming, and food and clothing assistance. We received Kinship Caregiver Program TANF Grants of over \$2.8 million through collaboration with the Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services. This has allowed our agency to aid 1,168 families (2,040 children) with basic needs including rent and mortgage payments, utilities, clothing, food, school event fees and uniforms. Unfortunately, the \$15M/year TANF earmark for the Kinship Caregiver Program has been cut from the current budget proposal, removing \$1.5 million in annual grant funding from our agency.

Although we provide significant support to our kinship families, the implementation of the Ohio Kinship Support Program (KSP) provides additional needed support for kinship families caring for a child in agency custody. However, the push for these kinship families to become certified foster homes to continue receiving financial support shifts the long-term cost of this program to counties. Our agency estimates our additional costs of kinship certification to exceed \$9 million per year.

In the past year, the focus on prevention services has shifted our average number of in-home prevention cases by approximately 10%, reducing the number of placements in agency custody. Over 50% of our cases are receiving in-home prevention services to stabilize the family and prevent the trauma that comes from removal.

We have also reduced our reliance on congregate care by 31% over five years. Even with the reduced use of institutions, FCCS faces a potential loss of \$3 million per year due to the three-year delay on congregate care settings meeting Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) requirements. Until facilities meet this designation, counties will not be able to collect federal reimbursement for a portion of their costs.

Despite strong community support through our levy, our agency is facing the largest budget deficit that I have experienced in my time here. That is before the loss of the Kinship Caregiver Program Grant funding, the increased cost for kinship families becoming certified foster homes, and the loss of federal revenue due to non-compliance with QRTP requirements.

We are at a pivotal time where we need to move from a reactive system to a proactive system. We know that kids have the best outcomes when they are placed in family-like settings and connected to a supportive permanent placement. The longer kids spend in our system, the worse the outcomes they experience. We have data that demonstrate that we can support and preserve families with a comprehensive array of community-based services. Right now, this array does not exist across Franklin county or Ohio, nor do we have the trained and diverse staff needed to provide these services. But we know it can be developed and outcomes will improve. And just as critical, we need to be very thoughtful and consider equity in our investments to ensure that our black and brown children are not adversely impacted but benefit from our investments.

The investments made in the last biennial budget have certainly made a positive impact on the lives of our vulnerable children and their families. Maintaining these investments while further investing in our most vulnerable children ensures that we truly are laying the foundation for transformation.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.