

**Interested Party testimony submitted to the
House Finance Committee
House Bill 110
Eric Morse, President and CEO
The Centers/Circle Health**

Chair Oelslager, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 110. I am Eric Morse, President and CEO of the Centers/Circle Health.

The Centers for Families and Children & Circle Health Services serve more than 30,000 people at 14 locations throughout Greater Cleveland and the inner-ring suburbs to provide access to health services, early childhood education, family support, and workforce and workplace development.

Our Mission is to improve the lives of those we serve through integrated primary care, behavioral health, early learning and family support services.

The Centers and Circle Health Services operate under a shared leadership structure as one, unified front moving towards a common goal: creating life-changing solutions for people in Northeast Ohio to lead healthier and more successful lives. We are leading the way in providing an innovative and integrated model that coordinates health and wellness services with family support programs, including early childhood development, job training and workplace and workforce development. The organization is one of the oldest and largest nonprofit organizations in Northeast Ohio.

Our top rated early learning services help children and families make the most of the critical first 2,000 days of life to be healthy, kindergarten-ready and prepared to succeed in school and life. Preschool, childcare, home-based, special needs, health and nutrition and prenatal service provide support for parents and caregivers. In Ohio, living in poverty means that a family of three is living off \$25,000 or less. More than half a million of Ohio's children are living in poverty. Even for those families who are working, many are in low-paying jobs or are offered hours that are too few to meet basic needs, leaving families struggling to survive. Without adequate external resources, interventions, or financial investments by those entities with the capability to make positive impacts, these families become stuck in a cycle of generational poverty—a situation where families live in poverty for multiple generations.

Poverty has a lasting, profound impact on the children living in these circumstances. With higher divorce rates and housing instability in these families, children suffer significant levels of stress, which negatively affects their mental and physical health. These compounded traumas result in poorer education outcomes and, later, poorer job outcomes. Parents who do work often have child-care challenges that were difficult to overcome due to inflexible work hours or job types, and outside care may be financially out-of-reach.

The root causes of generational poverty are complex, and the solutions need to be more comprehensive, if we are ever to end this cycle of poverty. This requires organizations providing services to be more thoughtful about addressing core issue, as well as government agencies providing sufficient financial support to make real solutions possible to carry out.

Health and human services organizations too often treat the populations they serve in isolation. While an agency may provide services to both children and their parents, these services may be delivered separately, with distinct staff, intake systems, outcome measures, and data collection.

This siloed approach may help address problems in the short term, but it falls short when it comes to improving the long-term outcomes of the family as a unit. To address this challenge, The Centers in Cleveland, Ohio is embracing an agency-wide “two-generation” approach (“2Gen”). The 2Gen model builds family well-being by working simultaneously with children and the adults in their lives, combining interventions to interrupt the cycle of poverty.

Regardless of how they come to The Centers, families are treated as a unit, with deliberate communication and coordination between staff across all programs. The Centers is uniquely positioned to have a profound impact on the health and financial stability of families in Cleveland, since we provide the gamut of service lines needed by struggling families—Early Learning programs, Workforce Development, Behavioral health services, and Primary Care.

In order to begin the 2Gen approach, The Centers sought—and received—philanthropic support from the William J. and Dorothy K. O’Neill Foundation. However, just as holistic solutions and programs are required to address generational poverty, so are holistic funding streams. Our budget request of the State also seeking investment from TANF dollars would enable The Centers to hire a multi-disciplinary team that would work together across the organizations services lines to ensure all aspect of the families’ barriers are met under one organizational umbrella.

Thank you for your consideration of our funding request, which will invest \$500,000 per year for the Centers for Families and Children in Cleveland for the Two Generational Model of Service Program.

Additional Background on the Centers

Health

We provide high-quality health care to everyone who walks in our door, regardless of ability to pay. Our integrated model of care includes primary care for children and adults, psychiatry, behavioral health care, dental, addiction services, HIV treatment & in-house pharmacies. Through our integrated approach, we provide support to pregnant women, addressing the infant mortality crisis and providing supportive services for the mother during and after pregnancy. We provide health care services to more than 12,000 people each year.

Family

Our top rated early learning services help children and families make the most of the critical first 2,000 days of life to be healthy, kindergarten-ready and prepared to succeed in school and life. We operate seven 5-Star rated early learning centers serving children from birth to age five and a comprehensive home visiting program serving families from the pre-natal timeframe to kindergarten. Each year, we serve more than 1,000 families in Cuyahoga County. Our model provides comprehensive support for children, including support for special needs, a focus on nutritional foods through our in-house kitchen, and individualized family support.

Work

Our free workforce programs are open to anyone 18+ (no high school diploma required) and includes short-term career training, specialized industry certifications, and job placement services with more than 100 regional and national employers. Our innovative & individualized approach provides flexible training options for families.