



**Testimony on H.B. 110: Main Operating Budget for FY 2022-2023
House Finance Subcommittee on Health & Human Services
Natalie A. Leek, President and CEO**

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Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the Committee, my name is Natalie Leek, President and CEO of Providence House, the state's first licensed children's crisis nursery located in Cuyahoga County. Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on House Bill 110.

Ohio is facing a foster care crisis. Last year, nearly 27,000 children were placed out of home - over 3,000 more than in 2016. We are struggling to find foster families and public children's services agencies are often forced to look beyond their county and even state borders to find foster homes. **Beyond the trauma for a child removed from their parent, studies show that we spend \$4 in behavioral health and intervention services for former foster youth for every \$1 we spent on them while in foster care.** Additionally, mothers who lose custody have higher rates of mental illness, substance abuse, and their death by suicide is 4 times higher.

For nearly 40 years, Providence House has worked to keep kids safe and families together. We are licensed as a children's crisis care facility by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. **We are a trusted community resource that has reunited over 10,000 children with their families.**

We work with parents who are struggling to meet their children's basic needs, require medical, mental health, or substance abuse treatment, are homeless, or fleeing domestic violence. **75% of the families we serve have history with child protective services and fear that will lose custody of their children if they seek help from public agencies. So, they come to us.**

We provide free, noncustodial shelter to children newborn to 12 years old and partner with parents to address family crises, strengthen parenting skills, and wrap and connect resources and services around each family to ensure positive, permanent change for the whole family.

Our multi-generational approach focused on both the child and caregiver works. **Last year 99% of the children who stayed with us were reunited with their parent after an average stay of 24 days – this is an 89% higher rate of reunification than foster care in 95% less time.**

And families stay together - a university evaluation of our families found that **82% of the children we serve were not placed in foster care** – even 3-5 years after our services. We

are receiving national recognition for our success. Last year, Providence House was recognized by the U.S. Children's Bureau as a Children's Champion for Preventing Child Maltreatment.

Our services saved nearly \$10 million in foster care costs in Cuyahoga County last year alone. Factor in additional costs for higher need children and this quadruples to nearly \$30 million. Imagine the impact and savings if more Ohio counties had a crisis nursery to help prevent parents from needing to relinquish custody to foster care.

Our results have created interest in other Ohio communities seeking a solution to the foster care crisis. Providence House is currently supporting champions in Toledo, Columbus, and Southeastern Ohio who hope to replicate our model in this biennium and keep hundreds of more children safe and families together in Ohio.

In the past five years calls for admission and the number of unserved children has quadrupled, with 458 children waitlisted or unserved last year due to limited capacity. To address this need, Providence House will open a 20-bed crisis nursery in the Buckeye-Shaker Neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland to nearly double our service capacity. **At least one other crisis nursery in Ohio also has plans to double their capacity to meet increased demand over the biennium.**

The prior budget included \$750,000 each fiscal year for crisis nurseries, which I was pleased to see continued in the Governor's introduced budget. **I ask for your support of an increase to the Children's Crisis Care line item to \$1.25 million each fiscal year to assist Ohio's existing crisis nurseries with meeting the increased demand for our services** and support new nurseries that may come online during this time.

While much attention has been given to recruiting kin and foster families in Ohio, **I ask that you give that same attention to programs that keep kids out of foster care and with their biological parents – programs like crisis nurseries that are already helping Ohio's families stay safely together.** Your support will not only demonstrate your commitment to preserving families – it will align Ohio with the Family First Prevention Services Act passed by Congress in 2018 - and generate millions in savings for child welfare and foster care costs in Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you about House Bill 110 and our request for support of the vital work done by crisis nurseries to keep hundreds of children safe and their families together while bringing significant cost savings to the state.