



**Senate Finance Committee  
HB 110 – Interested Party Testimony  
Friday, June 4, 2021**

Good afternoon Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of provisions for foster youth in House Bill 110.

My name is Kim Eckhart, and on behalf of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and in partnership with ACTION Ohio and the Ohio Youth Advisory Board, I am adding yet another voice to provide testimony as a follow up to the many different voices that have spoken to this committee about the need for a Youth Ombudsman for youth in biological, kinship, foster, adoptive, respite, residential and group home placements.

Today, I am asking to add a floor amendment, SC3398, that would clearly state the legislature's intent to support a Youth Ombudsman Office that would give young people someone to call when they are unsafe and not listened to by the current system.

Many who have lived experience in the foster care system have appeared before you to explain the need for an independent youth ombudsman designed by and for current and former foster youth. They have personally shared and expressed the need for provisions to HB110 to be added to ensure that a Youth Ombudsman would be implemented with the following key components: that it be independent and autonomous, that it be dedicated to foster youth, and that it be designed by current and former foster youth.

Today, the request is more basic. We simply ask that you show the legislature's support by dedicating funding for this purpose through amendment SC3398. This is so important after seeing the reduction of over \$27 million to the program operations appropriation line item in the Department of Job and Family Services proposed in the Senate's substitute version of the budget bill. JFS indicated that any funding for this critical initiative will be set aside internally within this appropriation line item. The reduction jeopardizes this initiative because ODJFS must now reprioritize its investments. For this reason, it is crucial for this body to clearly state within HB110 that funding for a Youth Ombudsman should be set aside.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to respond to any questions.

**Contact:**

Kim Eckhart  
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio  
keckhart@childrensdefense.org