

**Testimony submitted to the**  
**Senate Health Committee**  
**House Bill 110**  
**Eric Morse, President and CEO**  
**The Centers/Circle Health**

Chair Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health 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 and workforce training.

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 visiting, health and nutrition and prenatal services 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. Cleveland ranks the worst in the country for childhood poverty, with more than 50% of our children 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 families facing housing instability, high parental stress and increased exposure to crime, children often 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 do something different and be more thoughtful about addressing core issues, as well as government agencies providing sufficient financial support to make real solutions possible to carry out.

The Health and human services system is set up to 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. The Centers is working to do things differently. We are with our families in one way or another during the critical first 2,000 days of life of a child – from birth to age five. We are setting the goal that by the time our children enter kindergarten, we will have helped that family no longer be in poverty. 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. The 2 Gen approach includes job training and education to obtain higher wage jobs, treating the health care and behavioral health care of both the parents and the children, early childhood education so that the children are ready for kindergarten, and navigation and crisis support to the family.

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 organization’s services lines to ensure all aspects 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.