

House Bill 352
Proponent Testimony
April 23, 2024
Julia Barton

Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written comments regarding House Bill 352. I am writing as a former foster parent and an adoptive parent from northeast Ohio. I am a member of Adoption Network Cleveland (ANC) and am grateful to be a part of ANC's Public Policy Committee. I am also a student of trauma-informed care.

When we became foster parents seven years ago, my husband and I knew very little about trauma, ACEs (adverse childhood experiences), and trauma-informed care. We had been through the pre-service foster parent training, but had no idea how to be parents, let alone effective foster parents to the children who were about to be placed with us. The children who were about to be placed with us in April 2017 became our sons through adoption at the end of 2020. They are amazing, resilient people and have experienced many ACEs in their short lives.

To help us learn to parent our kids, our foster agency, Caring for Kids, introduced us to Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI). TBRI is a research-based, accessible package of interventions that are designed to meet the needs of children who have been exposed to trauma. This training was life-changing for us as parents, for our family in all its forms, and for our adopted and foster children. **Trauma-informed care is effective, and we need more focus, education, and support for it in the state of Ohio, which is why I was so happy to see the efforts of Representatives Baker and Carruthers and their leadership on this important issue.**

The ACEs studies conducted by Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 were instrumental in understanding the lifelong impacts of traumatic childhood experiences. The data demonstrated a relationship between the number of ACEs a person experienced and challenging outcomes in adulthood. The more ACEs experienced, the greater the risk of these outcomes.¹ Examples of ACEs include emotional abuse and neglect, physical abuse and neglect, substance use, mental illness, domestic violence, criminal behavior, divorce, separation, and the death of a loved one. The outcomes include a variety of serious physical and mental health and quality of life concerns, such as chronic health issues (obesity, diabetes, heart disease, among others), substance use challenges, and mental illness. ACEs can also have negative impacts on learning, work opportunities, and relatedly, earning potential.²

Being trauma-informed is not just about parenting, and it's not just about foster care and adoption, though these groups are certainly specially impacted. Understanding trauma is about understanding needs behind behaviors, breaking cycles, and helping people to feel safe in their own skin. It's about growing healthy communities. People experience trauma in all walks of life and in myriad ways. ACEs demonstrate how adverse childhood experiences can impact a

¹ Show Hope: ACEs and TBRI <https://showhope.org/stories/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-tbri/>

² CDC: Preventing ACEs <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>

person *and a community* over time. A trauma-informed perspective has the potential to transform our schools and homeschools, our teams and extra-curriculars, our healthcare systems, justice systems, our foster system, and our places of worship. Trauma has impacted every family I know in some form or another, and while children are uniquely vulnerable to these experiences, trauma-informed perspectives can help both children and adults.

By supporting this bill, and establishing an Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Commission to focus on and think about strategies for recommendation to the General Assembly to address the prevalence and effects of ACEs could be a game changer for individuals, families, and communities in Ohio. If we understand ACEs, we can develop preventive strategies and interventions to support people- kids and adults- who have experienced trauma. I can imagine the many possibilities that could stem from this commission and provide real, tangible differences for people in our state, including my two children, not to mention the more than 16,000 children in foster care in Ohio, and their families.³

I strongly support House Bill 352 to create an Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Commission in Ohio. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, for your consideration of these comments, and for your service on this committee.

Julia Barton

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'j b', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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³ Ohio Department of Education and Workforce: Students in Foster Care
<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Foster-Care>