

**House Bill 352**  
**Proponent Testimony, April 23, 2024**  
**Betsie Norris**  
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Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written proponent testimony for House Bill 352. My sincere appreciation goes to Reps. Baker and Carruthers for their work and leadership on this important issue.

I am the founder and executive director of Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection. We provide advocacy, support, programming and education for adoptees, adoptive families, birth families, youth in foster care and foster care alumni. We celebrated our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year and have been involved in legislative advocacy throughout our years, primarily focused on elevating the collective voices of those most directly touched by our state's laws in this area: adoptees, birth and adoptive families, and youth in foster care.

Potentially traumatic experiences that occur to those under 18 have been deeply studied and are termed Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Children with higher ACE scores have difficulty managing their behavior. Children who have experienced family separation that resulted in becoming part of an adoptive, foster, or kinship family have often experienced trauma, which affects their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These traumas can vary widely and may include abandonment, abuse, and neglect.

ACEs are a critical public health issue and are crucial to study and address because they profoundly impact an individual's life trajectory in a multitude of ways.

According to research by Child Trends, one in ten children nationally has experienced three or more ACEs, placing them in a category of especially high risk. In five states—Arizona, Arkansas, Montana, New Mexico, and **Ohio**—as many as one in seven children had experienced three or more ACEs.<sup>1</sup>

ACEs can significantly affect physical and mental health throughout a person's life. Exposure to trauma during childhood increases the risk of chronic diseases, mental health disorders, and substance abuse in adulthood.

ACEs have long-term consequences. ACEs can alter brain development, leading to emotional and behavioral difficulties. These effects persist into adulthood, influencing relationships, coping mechanisms, and overall well-being.

This bill creates an Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Commission tasked with recommending legislative strategies to the General Assembly to address the prevalence and effects of ACEs. By understanding ACEs, we can develop preventive strategies. Early intervention and support can

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<sup>1</sup> [The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, nationally, by state, and by race or ethnicity - Child Trends - ChildTrends](#)

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mitigate the impact of trauma, promoting resilience and healthier outcomes. Studying ACEs informs public health policies and programs. It helps allocate resources effectively, create trauma-informed systems, and break cycles of adversity.

I enthusiastically support House Bill 352 to create an Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Commission in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of H.B. 352. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at [betsie.norris@adoptionnetwork.org](mailto:betsie.norris@adoptionnetwork.org) or (216) 482-2314.