

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 3/30/2023

Name: Meredith Ripley

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): _____

Position/Title: _____

Address: 100 N Alderwood Circle

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HC-135-0507

Specific Issue: Regarding budget ammendment that provides program support to A Kid Again

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

A Kid Again is a nonprofit organization that serves families raising children across the State of Ohio with life- threatening medical conditions, like mine. The budget ammedment A Kid Again is proposing that has been drafted by Rep. Sweeney will positively impact families across the state of Ohio raising children with life-threatening medical condtions.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and Finance Committee Members:

My name is Meredith Ripley, and my daughter, Hannah, is seven, and is an enrolled child with A Kid Again. Hannah was born with a genetic condition that impacts every aspect of her life. She experiences gross motor, fine motor, and speech delays. She was exclusively tube fed for the first year and a half of her life. She wore oxygen daily for the first three years and wears it even now during illness. She has had 7 major surgeries, has been under anesthesia more times than I can count, and has spent more than 6 months of her life in the hospital. She has coded twice and has been on ventilators for weeks at a time. Her genetic condition has also caused many congenital anomalies. We hate the term “birth defects;” we just like to say she’s fancy. One of these anatomical differences is that she was born with one lung, resulting in a 50% chance of survival.

But Hannah is not my only child. I have two older boys whose lives have been forever changed by the birth of their sister and the challenges she has faced. When Hannah stays at the hospital, I stay with her. This means that, for six months of my boys’ lives, they have been without a mom. All stability was gone, as they were bounced from friend to friend, as we struggled to find care for them while my husband worked.

We found A Kid Again in 2019, when Hannah was three years old. It has been nothing short of magic. A Kid Again provides monthly outings, which they call “Adventures,” for families with children with life threatening illnesses. They provide admission, parking, food, and sometimes prizes and souvenirs. They plan every aspect of the events and think of every detail. We have gone to places like King’s Island, Columbus Crew games, Blue Jacket’s games, Ohio State Basketball games, and magic shows. There is no way we would have had the capacity or resources to allow our children to experience all these things without A Kid Again.

Families like mine, even if they have the economic resources to do fun things like these with their children, do not have the capacity to do much more than put one foot in front of the other. We are in survival mode, but A Kid Again gives us the opportunity to put all of that on hold and enjoy time together as a family, to truly allow my kids to be kids again.

The benefit of this organization for children like Hannah is obvious. But my favorite part of A Kid Again is that it is for the whole family. One of my greatest fears when Hannah was born was that my boys would grow to resent her. That they would resent the amount of time she requires, how difficult her illness can make things, how stretched we have been as a result. But A Kid Again allows something beautiful to come out of something so hard. Because of Hannah, they have had the opportunity to do so many amazing things.

I am here today to share our family’s story, and to ask you to consider supporting Representative Sweeney’s amendment to include A Kid Again in the state budget. Not only would this allow A Kid Again to open its doors to serve countless new families, but it would provide funding to create the new position of Community Connector, whose focus would be on helping families access additional resources. This individual would connect families with resources provided by local charities and would assist families with enrollment in benefits and programs already funded by the state of Ohio.

The economic impact of a child with a life-threatening medical condition is profound. Hannah’s medical bills have totaled more than \$2,000,000. We have spent countless thousands of dollars traveling for

medical care. There have been days that we were only able to put food on the table due to the generosity of others. The ability for A Kid Again to connect families with additional resources will be life changing for so many families.

Because of Hannah's illness, our children have had to experience so many difficult things. But because of A Kid Again, her illness has also brought about some of my children's most treasured moments. They have gotten to do things that their peers could only dream of. They have had the opportunity to throw touchdown passes with a national championship quarterback on the turf at the Horseshoe, and have the signed jerseys to prove it. They are able to look on her illness with gratitude, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and Finance Committee Members, thank you for your time today and thank you for considering the impact that A Kid Again has on families like mine.