

**TESTIMONY OF CHILD FOCUS**  
**OHIO HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**H.B. 33**

**March 14, 2023**

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today. My name is Pamela Lindeman, President and CEO for Child Focus.

**Who We Are**

Child Focus is a nonprofit organization that strengthens the quality of life for 20,000 individuals in central and southern Ohio across 22 counties by developing thriving kids, strong families and successful adults.

In operation since 1977, Child Focus administers two main programs: Early Learning and Behavioral Health and serves at-risk children and adults who live in poverty, have family dysfunction, involvement in foster or kinship care, are impacted by the criminal justice system, and have experienced physical and verbal abuse, trauma, mental health and substance use issues.

There is a great need in the communities we serve, particularly the under resourced Appalachian region of southern Ohio, for programs that help families who are struggling. Child Focus impacts the lives of those whom we serve by responding to 2AM crisis hotline calls and mobile crisis runs; providing high quality child care, supporting law enforcement and individuals in the jails and juvenile detention and providing “just in time” emergency mental health treatment to individuals on the brink of suicide.

However, Child Focus’ continued work is reliant upon having adequate resources to maintain these programs and to serve even more families.

**Getting Results**

We are grateful to the Ohio General Assembly for appropriating \$500,000 in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 through a TANF Block Grant earmark. These federal state appropriated dollars went to Child Focus’ Strong Families program and the results of this investment were life changing.

In the first year of the TANF-funded Strong Families program, we were able to serve 469 individuals (300 children and 169 caregivers) in Clermont, Brown, Adams, Highland, and Hamilton Counties. This program has often been the catalyst to keep these large families, mostly children, together and out of foster care or homelessness and to stabilize them financially and as a family unit.

The program formula is simple, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and is laser-focused on family stability and well-being, economic mobility and self-sufficiency. We use TANF funds to remove job or homelessness barriers, provided evidence-based, in-home Parenting services to stabilize the family unit because healthy family functioning is arguably one of the most influential contributors of healthy child development. Our TANF program reinforces long-term family self-sufficiency by providing job development services including technical or trade skill credentialing.

We are proud of the work we have done. Historically we have only been able to serve families who have open cases with Child Protective Services (CPS). TANF has allowed us to serve families who need help before their children are in CPS custody or are homeless. We are wrapping up our second year of programming with a waitlist of more than 22 families, comprised of 40 children and 23 adults. Domestic and Juvenile Courts, law enforcement, Job and Family services are begging us to expand.

### **Building Upon Success**

I am asking this committee to support an amendment to H.B. 33 that we have been working on with Rep. Jean Schmidt that would appropriate \$1 million in each fiscal year through the TANF Block Grant earmark. This appropriation would allow Child Focus to double the number served to 1,000 children and adults.

Since Child Focus serves both children and adults, we have an amendment that would appropriate \$500,000 in each fiscal year through the Department of Children and Youth for our Strong Families programs that provide assistance to children and \$500,000 in each fiscal year through the Department of Job and Family Services for our programs that provide assistance to adults. These dollars would also allow us to add additional staff, including one Job Navigator and two Parent Educators.

The TANF Block Grant earmark dollars we are requesting will help fund the types of programs that the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program was designed to address. These dollars will assist families with children when the parents or other responsible relatives cannot provide for the family's basic needs. It will help needy families end dependency on government benefits and encourage stability and self-sufficiency for STRONG families.

### **Why This Matters**

Our commitment to improve the lives of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens is heartfelt and that commitment starts at the top with me. I feel that I relate well to the families Child Focus serves because I was in the public child welfare system through age 7. I remain grateful to the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services for the "life-changing" care and opportunity I was given. This experience inspired me to give back by entering the social work field, earning a Bachelor's of Social Work degree from the University of Cincinnati and a Master's degree in Community Mental Health from Xavier University. I completed my clinical residency at Child Focus and in 2019 I became CEO, where every day I have the opportunity to provide hope to others who find themselves facing similar circumstances that I faced as a young girl.

We appreciate the conversations we have had so far with members of this committee. Your support for this amendment will help improve the lives of families and at-risk children. We would love to share individual success stories about how we have helped stabilize children and families; parents become productive members of the workforce; lowered dependence on government programs; and increased quality of life outcomes.

Chair Carruthers and members of the subcommittee, we urge your support for this amendment request. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.