

Testimony to the House Finance Committee May 25, 2023 regarding increased funding for kinship care

Committee Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, ranking Minority member, Sykes and the other members of the Senate Health Committee: my name is Larry Bresler. I have been an active member of the Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE) since it began in 2003. I am also a social worker who has taught for the past 17 years at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, their school of social work.

I am here today to urge you increase the budgetary amount allocated for kinship care in the 2425 state budget. As you are aware kinship care is the raising of children who can no longer live with their parents (either permanently or temporarily) by grandparents, other close family members, or other adults with whom they have a close family like relationship. In study after study it has been found that children who have to be removed from their biological parents fare far better in kinship care over foster care for a variety a reasons, a few of which include

- It minimizes trauma for the children,
- It improves children's well-being.
- Improves their behavioral and mental health outcomes
- They have better educational outcomes and stability
- It provides a greater opportunity for continued family connections with an opportunity for family reunification.

As a result of these many studies the federal government for decades has mandated a preference for kinship care.

42 U.S.C. 671, says states must "consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant state child protection standards."

However, many kinship care givers or potential kinship care givers particularly grandparents are not financially able to assume the responsibility of being kinship care legal guardians. Many are low-income or on fixed income. NOBLE has worked with or been in contact with grandparents with big hearts who would love to be kinship care givers for their grandchildren but do not have the financial resources to do so. We have also worked with many others who are kinship care givers but are regularly struggling to put food on their tables, provide all of the housing needs or afford other important needs for the children.

When Governor DeWine announced his executive budget proposal, he stated that as a result of the opioid crisis and related impacts, over 15,000 children are in the custody of county children services agencies today. He then put forward an additional \$10 million for foster care in the state budget. It was very disappointing that notwithstanding the federal mandate for kinship care, he requested no additional money for kinship care, from what has previously been allocated. where in all likelihood most of those 15,000 children would prefer to be in a kinship

care placement and they would have fared better in that setting. Furthermore he defunded The Kinship Caregiver Program, which was funded at \$10 million per year in the last biennium budget. The program provides one-time stabilization expenses, such as cribs or beds for children and short-term reimbursement for childcare for kinship caregivers. The House of Representatives kept Gov. DeWine's defunding when it passed its budget.

The lack of proper support for kinship care givers has been reflected in placement of children who have been removed from their parents by county human service departments. For example, in the last year in Cuyahoga County well over half of the placements of children removed from their parents have been with foster care or other juvenile home placements rather than kinship care.

In conclusion I urge you to both restore the \$20 million in funding for the Kinship Caregiver Program and increase funding that will move Ohio toward equity of kinship care with foster care payments. Kinship Care providers should receive allowances to adequately meet the needs of providing care for the children in their care including food, shelter, transportation, childcare, and other necessities.

Thank you.
Larry Bresler