

Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation and Equality (NOBLE)

Senate Subcommittee on Health

Good morning to all Subcommittee members. My name is Delores Gray from Cleveland, Ohio. Thank you, for this time to express the importance of developing and passing Budget legislation that should be centered around the needs of the families and communities most devastated by the events of the last three years.

I am a grieving mother, a grandmother of two young men, nine and twelve, a kinship care provider, and a community wellness activist. With that said, I have major concerns about the health and wellness of my family, my community, and my city Cleveland. Our community care infrastructure needs to be strengthened in order to support more demand. Expand funding for services that are needed for children and their families dealing with disabilities, such as learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, and other medical disorders. We must bridge the gap by increasing funding that will provide better services for all counties.

The pandemic brought about many problems, and has caused a big crack in our city infrastructure. Small businesses closed, and there are fewer resources that allow mothers and caregivers to work, such as childcare programs, food assistance programs, & elderly care. Residents have been losing their homes, alongside increased behavioral problems and mental health issues, but there are more patients than providers. I know from my own journey, of losing a daughter right before the pandemic and becoming a kinship caregiver for my two grandsons, it has been very hard just managing life. Ohio must improve quality and expand access to all programs and services that support families, children and our elderly. In order for Cleveland and our surrounding poor counties to thrive, increases in funding must happen. Furthermore, we must have equity between how the state supports foster care parents and kinship caregivers. Provisions in previous budgets that pushed towards this equity have not reappeared in any version of this year's budget. Children who are kept with their families have far better outcomes, and families like mine need your support. Thank you for your time.