



Good afternoon, Chairwoman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is Susan Lewis Kaylor, and I serve as the President and CEO at St. Vincent Family Services.

St. Vincent Family Services (SVFS) provides a comprehensive range of quality, trauma-informed behavioral health services for children and families in Franklin County and across the state of Ohio. Children receiving care at SVFS are referred by hospitals and medical professionals, community schools, daycares and preschools, child welfare, residential treatment facilities, foster families, and a variety of youth-serving community organizations. Unique to the behavioral health industry, SVFS is the *only organization in Central Ohio* providing acute day treatment services to children as young as three years old. Day Treatment programming integrates quality academic instruction and behavioral health therapy in an on-site school setting, stabilizing acute behavioral challenges and preparing students for a successful transition back to a traditional school setting. Students range from ages 3-12, hold at least one mental health diagnosis, and display behavior challenges too unsafe for a typical classroom environment. St. Vincent Prep Academy is SVFS' state-of-the-art facility on the near eastside of Columbus, delivering 18 low-ratio classrooms equipped with educational technology and sensory equipment that provide a therapeutic learning environment for the unique, complex needs of the student population.

In 2022, more than 80% of SVFS families lived at low or very low-income, 90% reported lived experiences of trauma upon entering care, and more than 70% identified as non-white race. Living in poverty and coping with environmental deficits and compound traumas makes it nearly impossible for families to access safe, reliable services for complex behavioral health needs. **SVFS is the last and only resort for many families desperate for a lifeline.**

Like many organizations you have heard from in this committee, workforce is our largest challenge. In February of 2020, SVFS was fully staffed with 118 clinical staff, direct care specialists and operating 18 full classrooms. Currently, we have 88 staff members and are only able to utilize 9 of our classrooms with a significant waitlist that continues to grow. This waitlist is made up of children in need of specialized behavioral health services that will help them live healthy and successful lives. The waitlist also creates a huge strain to parents and family members as they have no other options until a slot is open.

SVFS is proposing a recalibration of its existing business model and salary scales for positions specific to day treatment services for young children. **SVFS is requesting \$1.2 million in fiscal year 2024 to support the necessary investments in workforce development to ensure every child waiting for care has access to essential behavioral health day treatment services.** This funding is bridge funding and would open all of our classrooms, eliminate our waitlist, and set up SVFS and the children in our care for a strong and self-sustaining future. Our request was included in the House passed version of House Bill 33 and we hope the Ohio Senate will retain this necessary investment.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.