

TESTIMONY OF CHILD FOCUS
OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE

H.B. 33

May 10, 2023

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today. My name is Pamela Lindeman, President and CEO for Child Focus.

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 child welfare, the criminal justice system, and have significant trauma histories and need behavioral health and substance use disorder services.

Child Focus is someone to call, someone to listen and someone to help whether it is responding to 2AM crisis hotline calls and mobile crisis runs; providing high quality child care, parenting, job training or providing “just in time” emergency mental health treatment to individuals on the brink of suicide.

While our service impact is life-changing for many Ohioans in our region, there remains tremendous need to expand services particularly the under resourced Appalachian region of southern Ohio. These communities are seeking services to help lift them out of poverty towards economic self-sufficiency and mental wellness. Healthy family functioning is fundamental to healthy child development.

Child Focus’ continued work is reliant upon having the needed resources to both maintain and expand our highly successful TANF services.

We are grateful to the Ohio General Assembly for appropriating \$500,000 in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 through a TANF Block Grant earmark which made it possible for us to launch our Strong Families Program; the results of this investment have been life changing.

In the first year of the TANF-funded Strong Families program, we served 469 individuals in Clermont, Brown, Adams, Highland, and Hamilton Counties. This program has been the catalyst for keeping children and families together, moving them away from child welfare, homelessness, dependency on public benefits and toward financial self-sufficiency.

TANF funds are used to remove job or homelessness barriers and provide evidence-based, in-home parenting services to stabilize families and move them to long-term self-sufficiency by providing job

development services including technical or trade skills credentialing. We are thrilled with the work we have done to establish this innovative program across the region. The TANF Strong Families program has changed the trajectory for families in the communities we serve. We are wrapping up our second year of programming with a waitlist for services (now at 22 families and growing every day). Domestic and Juvenile Courts, schools, law enforcement, Job and Family services and private citizens are begging us to expand the TANF Strong Families Program.

I am asking this committee to support House added provisions to H.B. 33 that would appropriate \$500,000 TANF Block Grant earmark in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and a \$500,000 TANF Block Grant earmark in each fiscal year through the new Ohio Department of Children and Youth. These appropriations would allow Child Focus to double the number served to 1,000 children and adults and allow us to add additional staff, including one Job Navigator and two Parent Educators.

Our commitment to improve the lives of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens is heartfelt and that commitment starts at the top because I was in the public child welfare system through age 7. I was the beneficiary of "life-changing" care and opportunity as a young child and inspired me to devote my career advocating for the needs of our communities most disadvantaged people.

We appreciate the Ohio Senate's past support for Child Focus and enjoyed having Senator Johnson and members from our House delegation tour our facility to see the work that we do firsthand. Your support for these House added appropriations 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 Huffman and members of the subcommittee, we urge your support for this amendment request. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.