

**Testimony submitted to the
Senate Health Committee
May 10, 2023**

**Eric Morse, President & CEO
The Centers & Cleveland Christian Home**

Dear Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 33. My name is Eric Morse and I serve as the President and CEO of The Centers in Cuyahoga County. In 2022, our organization and the Cleveland Christian Home (CCH) completed an affiliation agreement that brought CCH's youth residential treatment programs under The Centers' umbrella of services. In an increasingly complex, competitive, and highly regulated environment, this partnership was essential to achieve the scale CCH needed to continue to keep its direly needed services available to the community. The Centers' and CCH's services complement one another, allowing each agency to expand their continuum of behavioral health services. With the statewide crisis regarding children in custody and involved in multiple systems, being able to provide the full continuum of care is vital. As we work to combat historic workforce shortages following the COVID-19 pandemic, CCH is requesting that the Senate include \$1.5 million (\$750,000 per fiscal year) in H.B. 33 to rebuild the child welfare continuum in Northeast Ohio. This one-time investment will enable CCH to hire and train qualified residential care staff needed to reach our full capacity of 58 beds.

CCH provides trauma-informed mental health services to children from 15 counties in Ohio, with a majority of clients from Cuyahoga County. CCH is relied upon to work with children who have had multiple failed attempts at treatment, placement, and permanency. CCH offers traditional and intensive residential treatment. Both programs serve boys between the ages of 6 and 17 who participate in a highly structured, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy program 6 days per week to address one or more emotional or behavioral disorders that prevent them from living safely within the community. While in treatment at CCH, they attend CCH's on-grounds school staffed by the Cleveland Municipal School District. In addition to therapeutic services, kids learn age-appropriate daily living skills, participate in social and cultural activities, field trips around the city, and are provided opportunities to simply enjoy the carefree play that embodies the spirit of childhood.

Our history of success in working with the region's most severely emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children is evidenced by:

- The number of children discharged to a less restrictive environment, with 90% placed in a home environment (family members or foster care) or to their home of origin.
- 85% of children display sustained reduction in risky and unsafe behavior/emotions, ability to function at age-appropriate grade-level at discharge, or overall improved physical health – one of the greatest determinants of future morbidity, employability, and reliance on the system.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated systemic stressors on behavioral health and residential care workforce, leading to increased rates of burnout, turnover, and prolonged staff vacancies. Providers like CCH have struggled to offer competitive wages in large part due to reimbursement rates from public funders that have failed to keep pace with rising inflation. We are working with our partners at the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services to negotiate new rates that better match our costs of providing services. However, significant one-time funds are needed to quickly hire and train qualified residential treatment staff in numbers sufficient to meet the capacity of CCH's facilities as well as the need in the community for youth residential treatment.

In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated the national economic burden of child maltreatment was as high as \$2 trillion (2015 USD). The lifetime costs of child maltreatment were estimated at nearly \$1 million per child in non-fatal cases and \$17 million in fatal cases, inclusive of short and long-term health care costs, child welfare costs, criminal justice costs, special education costs, and lost productivity. The costs above are likely higher today, as workforce, supply chain, and other crises resulting from the pandemic have significantly increased the cost of failed intervention. The requested funding will provide CCH with a one-time "shot in the arm" to provide sustainable recovery from trauma for 500 children each year and help them to live in less restrictive environments.

A typical child in CCH's care has experienced prolonged exposure to violence, repeated failed attempts at placement, food insecurity, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, and aggressive outbursts. Untreated children who witness violence are more likely to be affected by chronic health conditions, homelessness, criminal justice involvement, and early death. For 120 years, CCH has been relied upon not to reject these children due to high risk of failure. In fact, we accept them into treatment because we refuse to give up. We hope this committee and the Senate will welcome this opportunity to make a vital investment in the lives of hundreds of children as we move forward in this exciting new chapter.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 216-225-1253 or Eric.Morse@thecentersohio.org.

Sincerely,



Eric Morse
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The Centers and Cleveland Christian Home