

Elma Laverne Dotson
Kinship /Co-Founder of Finland Guardian Group
Testimony of H.B. 96

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today on H.B. 96 and tell my kinship caregiving story. My name is Elma Laverne Dotson/Co-Founder of Finland Guardian Group, and I am here to advocate for my 13 year-old Autistic grandson and all kinship families in Ohio.

I found myself at 60 years old during the pandemic unemployed and needing extra help to meet my grandson's daily needs. I went looking and found resources that would help our kinship family. I spoke to the school principal, and she informed me that we have other kinship families here in the school needing help, so we formed the Finland Guardian Group in Dec. 2021.

As the Finland Guardian Group grew, we learned that drugs and alcohol were not the only reasons we have the children. Parents killed in car accidents, taken by cancer or a failed surgery. We saw that financial assistance was top on the list of challenges families faced. At the top, the cost of food, clothing, hygiene products, trips to doctor appointments- ours was 3 times a week, in all areas of Columbus, and utilities.

We need House Bill #96 to pass to enrich the lives of the children. We need to have the OWF "Child Only" cash assistance payment increased to \$600 and per child. This will help us pay for the high cost of food, utilities, daycare, play sports, dental braces and yes, AMC Movie or dinner out on a special occasion.

The cost of Foster Care is far more than we kinship families receive. There are many families who do not receive any assistance because their income is counted for eligibility; SNAP and childcare are examples. Programs are needed to help all kinship families reach the goal of stability and meet financial needs.

The funding would benefit our state's future. Children did not ask for the situation they are in. Knowing that we, as the State of Ohio, cares for their welfare and are willing to give to their families so they can grow holding their heads high.

We do it from our hearts, to keep our family members safe and give them stability.
Thank you again for the opportunity to provide my kinship views in testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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