



Good morning Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee.

My name is Amy Klaben, and I am the co-founder and president of Families Flourish. Today, I am here to request that you support continued funding for Families Flourish as we are currently in the State budget and are in the Governor's recommended appropriation. This is so that we can further our life-changing mission that first moves families to safety, then supports them to become more fully functioning members of the workforce.

First, a thank you for State dollars passed in 2023. The line items that supports our work to connect low-wage families to better-paying workforce jobs has been money well spent. We are so grateful. Those funds have helped us nearly double the number of people we are serving, and it has helped us to create the tools to take our results to other communities so that they may become an affiliate and utilize our impactful and unique model. The first will open in the Miami Valley this summer and we are in other conversations with other Ohio cities looking to adopt our transformative program.

We are grateful to be in the current budget which needs a corrective amendment on line item number 830402 to add our name, Families Flourish. Section 423.20 (at line 111289) also needs a corrective amendment, which we are working on with the Department of Children and Youth, to represent who we serve and what we do so it states that the funds: shall be used to support stable housing initiatives for low wage earning parents, primarily mothers, and their families to improve health and economic outcomes.

Families Flourish was founded with the goal of helping parents of young children move from lower-resourced areas to higher-resourced areas. Families Flourish makes affordable rental housing available in neighborhoods that offer access to opportunities, such as higher-resourced schools, safer neighborhoods, employment, sidewalks that lead to a public park, grocery stores, and other indicators of opportunities.

Families Flourish was created as a pilot with faculty in the City and Regional Planning program at The Ohio State University with community members and organizations from across Central Ohio. OSU researchers evaluate our unique-in-the-nation approach to ending poverty.

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The headline outcome for our 10-family pilot with OSU is that our moms raised their incomes by 58% or \$17,000 on average. That allowed our graduates to take on market-rate rent without any subsidy when their program concluded.

Additionally, we saw far fewer trips to emergency rooms for children who had been suffering asthma and other upper respiratory ailments when they were in unsafe, unhealthy housing and neighborhoods. We estimate that just among the 18 children in our pilot, those fewer ER trips alone resulted in estimated healthcare savings of \$75,000 over four years.

In July 2024, a new set of interviews with 9 of these 10 families revealed continued increased income two years after the program ended, averaging 18% higher wages since graduation from Families Flourish.

We continue to be evaluated by Ohio State and by Measurement Resources, a Columbus data company. In fact, the results from the pilot seen above seem to have replicability. The latest report from our OSU evaluation team shows:

- 67% of the respondents reported an income increase on average of \$4.85 per hour (\$9,700 per year based on full-time employment)
- 33% reported no increase or they reduced their income to attend school or other reasons

Our approach is unique in that we not only provide families with the tools and resources they need to move to higher-resourced areas, but we also offer ongoing support and advocacy to help them succeed and thrive in their new communities.

Here is how the program works:

Families Flourish is built as a three-year investment in a family. It includes financial and career coaching, monthly programming and partial rental support. Three years of rental support enables families to live in healthy, quality homes in a safe, higher-resourced Central Ohio neighborhood. Studies have shown that providing access to healthy, safe, affordable housing alone in higher-resourced neighborhoods will not provide the pathway to economic independence to the parents of children who move. The required coaching and programs that we provide help parents to develop relationships for emotional support and family stability. We are demonstrating that by enabling families with children ages 13 and under to move into higher-resourced neighborhoods, participants will see a host of educational, social, wellness, and trauma reduction benefits.

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We have seen the positive impact of our work firsthand. Families who have participated in our program have been able to improve their quality of life, access better educational opportunities for their children, and achieve financial stability for themselves.

Jameka moved just one ZIP code when she entered the Families Flourish program in the Fall of 2022, but it completely changed the way she and her son approach life. In her son's new school, third-grade reading scores are at 98% proficiency compared to his previous school, where the rate was 8%. Her son needed supports available at the new school to build confidence and get to grade level.

Her streets are safer, so she could teach her son to ride a bike for the first time – and they now can walk to school together.

Jameka went from part-time work at a school to full-time work with the City of Columbus, where she applies her knowledge of what young, single moms need to thrive. She's working in infant mortality and teaching others what she has learned about parenting and child development.

Most students engaged in extracurricular activities and many benefitted from our partnership with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The vast majority of parents indicated their children had a good or very good adjustment to their new schools with improved academic outcomes.

Our current retention rate is 90%. Today, we serve 74 families – all single moms but three, who are two-parent families. The children are young – the majority of them under age 4. We work with 20 private landlords in 54 communities to help house and stabilize our families.

The move starts working almost immediately on kids – they have safe places to play outdoors, more resources within their schools, and they notice when their parents are less stressed.

As our parents get settled into their new communities, we see the stress of hearing gunshots every night start to melt away. It usually takes 4-9 months for that to happen, and then we see the parents more fully engaging in the coaching the setting their goals even higher.

For Tiffany Isaac and her three children, it has meant going from temp work to a career in cyber security. Tiffany joined the Families Flourish program in August 2023. After a divorce, where her husband was the primary breadwinner, Tiffany picked up temp work and hoped to save for a house. When she was accepted into Families Flourish, she was focused on how the rent support would allow her to put down payment money away faster.

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Then she started working with her coach, who encouraged her to think about her interests and career goals. Tiffany had always loved science and had taken several programs that delved into various aspects of biology and chemistry. Her coach connected her to the technology certification nonprofit Per Scholas, where she was paid to take classes qualifying her for jobs at Intel and other Ohio tech companies.

Now, Tiffany is taking additional courses to learn cybersecurity – and in the meantime, she got a flexible job with generous benefits serving inside her children’s school! It gives her time to study and time to spend with her children while earning a good income.

However, our work is far from done. There are still many families in Ohio who are struggling to make ends meet and provide their children with the opportunities they deserve. With your support, we can continue to expand our reach and help even more families move to higher-resourced areas.

The State’s investment in Families Flourish will not only help families, but this innovative, new model will also benefit Ohio as a whole. By providing families with the resources they need to thrive, we can help to build stronger, more vibrant communities and ensure that all Ohioans have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I urge you to support Families Flourish and our mission to help parents of young children participate in our coaching and programs for economic mobility while enabling them to move from lower-resourced areas to higher-resourced areas. Your support will make a tangible difference in the lives of families across Ohio, and we are grateful for your consideration. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Amy Klaben  
President and CEO, Families Flourish