

To: The Children and Human Services Committee

Re: HB No. 96

Testimony: The State provides the same level of support for kinship care providers as it does for foster parents

My name is Tim Walters. I live in Cuyahoga County. I am currently 82 years old and have 8 children, 25 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren. I have been a foster parent and a kinship care Provider. I am also an adoptive parent.

I come to you today to urge that Ohio provides the same level of support for all kinship care providers as it does for foster parents in this current budget. Specifically

1. That the current budget contains funds to provide a per-diem payment equal to that provided for Foster Care Parents for all Kinship Care Providers.
2. That a line item is in the budget equal to the 10 million dollars for what I believe was called the Kinship Care Giver Program contained in a prior budget.

Let me provide a personal perspective regarding this request.

Children come into our childcare system for a variety of reasons. When they do so, they can follow various paths if it is determined that the child cannot remain with their parent or parents. The two most common are foster care and kinship care. I am not here to put down the foster care alternative. It is a critical component, and we have many great foster parents. But, it has been long recognized that there is much value in keeping a child in familiar circumstances with familiar faces. Kinship Care does that.

As such it should be the preferred alternative and support provided at the same level as for a foster care placement. About 23 years ago, I received a phone call from one of my daughters. She informed me that Cuyahoga County was in the process of removing her 6-year-old daughter from her home and placing her into the foster care system. My daughter had and still has a variety of mental health problems that prevented her from providing adequate care for my Granddaughter. As a result, Cuyahoga County Children Services had determined that she was unable to provide for her daughter at that time.

They did want to maintain my Granddaughter within the family and asked if I would provide the necessary care and take her into my home instead of a foster care placement. I said I

would. At the time, I was in my late 50's and had not expected to be caring for a young child again. For a variety of reasons, she remained with me until adulthood. At present, she is in her 30s and has a 9-year-old daughter of her own. She and her daughter are doing well. Much of her success stems from the placement of her with me and thus maintaining our extended family unit

Removing a child from their parents sets several different factors in motion. It is a very difficult time for the child and can easily set in motion a variety of new problems. Placing a child in a kinship care setting instead of foster care is an important alternative. Among other factors this provides love and care in a familiar setting while enabling children to live with people they know and trust. This was true for my Granddaughter. The key was our ability to maintain her within our family unit. She was scared when she first came to live with me. She was only six and did not understand anything that was happening to her. But she did know and trust me, and we were able to build on that trust. My daughter was going through much at the time. There were many difficulties, but she was able to face them knowing where and how her daughter was being cared for. It was a significant factor in enabling her to make her own gains.

My story is not an atypical one. It is one that many of our kinship care providers share. Another common piece that many of us also share is the need for financial support. Kinship care providers typically receive much less than foster care providers. Kinship care providers need and deserve assistance at the same level provided for Foster Care Providers.

I am asking that dollars be included in the current budget to enable per diem rates at levels equal to that provided to Foster Parents. Provide the resources to help with everyday activities, reduce the strain on the kinship provider's finances, and maintain a critical element allowing these children to move towards a sustainable future. In addition, I am asking that dollars be made available with the budget to restore the Kinship Care Program line item in this budget.

Thank you

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