

February 27, 2025
Children & Health Services Committee
Kinship Care Testimony

Chairperson White, Ranking Member Lett, and the rest of the committee, thank you for your time. My name is Diane Howard and I am one of the co-chairs of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality. I am speaking to you today seeking an increase in support for kinship care in Ohio.

I'm a senior citizen living in public housing in the Cleveland area who has lived and worked in this community for many years. I have always been an active community participant, and I currently serve as a resident commissioner for the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.

My youngest child suffered from Multiple Sclerosis and my husband Daniel suffered from arterial heart disease, and I was the primary caretaker for both of them. I have 21 grandchildren and 34 great grandchildren and raised four of my grandchildren myself, while working full time as a nurse. It was very difficult, providing kinship care to my grandchildren in addition to my other caregiving responsibilities especially since I could not receive necessary support like childcare and other needs.

I introduce myself this way to say that although I am no longer a kinship caregiver, I still know and speak on behalf of families in my neighborhood who I know, and who are caring for their extended family member children who have been removed from their home and want to avoid being placed into foster care.

From my own experience and I have found with other low-income kinship care givers, it is a real financial and logistics struggle to be a kinship care giver. As people with limited income, the amount that kinship care givers receive in Ohio does not begin to meet the

financial needs that we face. I believe it is important that the amount of support for kinship parents be raised to be in line with that of foster care parents. By doing this, more family members, particularly grandparents can become kinship caregivers, and the children can avoid being placed in the foster care system where there are not enough placements.

I also recognize that a challenge for kinship care givers is getting into affordable childcare. That certainly was the case when I was a kinship care giver, as my options were very limited. As a kinship care provider, I was not eligible for publicly funded childcare. Access to publicly funded child care assistance for kinship caregivers will help promote stability and continuity in the child's growth and education.

Therefore, I also support HB 7, which would guarantee that Kinship caregivers along with foster care parents would have full access to publicly funded child care. I mention this now, because I hope that HB 7 will be folded into and become part of the HB 96.

By supporting and increasing the financial support along with providing publicly funded childcare for kinship caregivers, we will go a long way toward allowing grandparents and other relatives to be able to provide the support and resources that are necessary as kinship caregivers.

We all have a moral obligation to the children of this great state to guarantee the basic educational and emotional support needs are met so that all of our children can thrive.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.