

Testimony on HB 96



Testimony before the House Children and Human Services Committee

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Testimony in support of the proposed executive budget

Good afternoon, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding H.B.96, Ohio's state budget for fiscal years 2026-2027. My name is Brianna Booker, and I am the policy associate for the Children's Defense Fund- Ohio. We are a statewide, multi-issue, child advocacy organization that has worked on behalf of children, young people, and families in Ohio for forty-three years. Our mission is to build community so that young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy.

I am here to speak as an interested party regarding the proposed Maternal and child health, as well as childcare provisions, outlined in this bill.

Just this past Thursday, during a focus group conversation with Ohio parents, one parent expressed that if offered the opportunity to address you, their elected representatives, the one issue that they would ask you to prioritize would be an increase in healthcare access, particularly for new mothers. Another participant, a first-time mother, described how they decided that they needed to give birth in a neighboring state because of the lack of resources available in the state of Ohio. The provisions proposed in H.B 96, such as funding home visiting services to new mothers, prenatal and preventative health visits for babies, and funding parent education programs (Sec. 5180.21), will help mothers like these. Moreover, the expansion of community impact models, including the creation of a board that will review pregnancy-associated deaths statewide to assist in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, is crucial to ensuring that Ohio families flourish (Sec. 5180.27).

CDF-Ohio supports the proposed funding for community programs across the state that address children's mental health and social and emotional development. As written, this funding is vital to reducing exclusionary school discipline practices and promoting academic readiness for

Ohio's kindergarteners (Section 423.50), which, as our organization emphasized in a 2024 report, is a necessity in Ohio¹.

We are excited that H.B. 96 works to ensure that children and youth with developmental delays receive evaluations, assessments, and service coordination (Section 423.40). This is particularly important because the state of Ohio is ranked seventh among the fifty states in the number of students with disabilities.² Funding early intervention services for youths with disabilities is critical to ensuring all children have what they need to thrive; and, in the words of CDF's Founder, if we do not stand for children—including disabled children--, then we do not stand for much.

During the focus group I mentioned earlier, one of our parents shared that finding reputable, affordable, available, and adequately staffed childcare is one of the biggest challenges in their community. The continuation of the childcare choice voucher program for families otherwise not eligible for Publicly Funded Childcare (Section 423.190) will provide critical assistance to families like theirs. According to a 2024 report by Policy Matters Ohio, a typical Ohio family with two children³ would need to save for approximately three years to afford just one year of childcare.⁴ We urge the committee to enact this provision. Additionally, as a vital step towards ensuring that Ohio families can prosper, Section 423.230 expands publicly funded childcare eligibility to those earning up to 160% of the federal poverty line, making childcare accessible to more families despite their socioeconomic status. This is a step in the right direction yet increasing eligibility to 300% could make an even greater impact on Ohio's children and families.

Foster-to-College Scholarship Program

Children who have experienced foster care face some of the most daunting barriers to higher education. Their dreams—our state's future—should never be derailed by circumstances beyond their control. Yet poverty, abuse, and neglect create obstacles that make even considering college an uphill battle. These young people need extra support—not just to succeed, but to even believe that higher education is within their reach.

Right now, Ohio is failing them. We rank in the bottom 10% of states when it comes to key outcomes for youth who have been in foster care. They are less likely to graduate from high school or earn a GED, less likely to find employment, and less likely to enroll in college or job training. At the same time, they are more likely to become involved in the justice system.

¹ [State of School Discipline 2024- Executive Summary](#)

² [Number and percentage of children served under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\), Part B, by age group and state or jurisdiction: Selected years, 1990-91 through 2020-21 ; 2023 Ohio Special Education Profile Report 5 28 24 Final.pdf](#)

³ The median household income in Ohio was \$66,990 in 2023 and The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines childcare as “affordable” if it costs 7% or less of a family's annual income.

⁴ [Ohio's childcare crisis - Policy Matters Ohio](#)

We know what works. Over 35 states have already implemented scholarships specifically for students with foster care experience, and the results are clear.

This is why I urge you to support House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program. This bill would provide "last dollar" scholarships to youth with foster care experience after the age of 14—filling in the financial gaps left by federal, state, and private aid. This investment isn't just morally right—it's fiscally responsible. It's a chance to break cycles of poverty, strengthen our workforce, and build a better future for Ohio.

We respectfully request that the Committee include funding for House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. This program has the power to change lives and uplift our state.

Conclusion

At the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, we recognize that despite the joys that accompany parenthood, there can also be trials that lead to a significant need for support, especially assistance with maternal health, child health, and childcare. Accordingly, we strongly endorse policies that will improve the chances of all Ohio children succeeding, and we feel that these provisions in H.B. 96 are a strong step forward in doing so.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding this important bill. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Respectfully,
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