



March 4, 2025

Written Proponent Testimony for House Bill 96
House Children and Human Services Committee
Jill Miller, President & CEO, bi3

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the Governor's proposal to expand home visitation services in Ohio. My name is Jill Miller, and I serve as the President and CEO of the bi3 Fund, a large health-focused funder in Ohio dedicated to advancing health equity and fueling innovation in Greater Cincinnati in order to improve health for *all* people.

At bi3, we have invested over \$100 million in grants to improve health outcomes, with a strong focus on maternal and infant health. We believe every baby deserves a healthy start, and we know that evidence-based home visiting is one of the most effective strategies to achieve that goal. Research has shown that high-quality home visiting programs lead to improved birth outcomes, enhanced parenting skills, reduced child maltreatment, and better school readiness.

Despite these proven benefits, Ohio is not reaching enough families in need. In 2023, only 8.8% of eligible families received home visiting services, leaving thousands of infants and parents without access to this life-changing support. Expanding home visiting is not just the right thing to do for families, it is also a sound financial investment. A cost-benefit analysis of the Nurse-Family Partnership model has demonstrated that every \$1 invested in home visiting yields up to \$5.70 in savings by reducing healthcare costs, special education needs, and child welfare involvement. Additionally, a study on Healthy Families America found that states can save over \$5,500 per enrolled family by preventing child abuse and neglect.

While home visiting is a critical program, it must be complemented by other evidence-based strategies to support children and families. That is why bi3 also supports Governor DeWine's investments in high-quality early childhood education and child care as well as his bold proposal for a refundable child tax credit – all strategies to support young children and their families.

Research confirms that high-quality early learning programs improve school readiness, cognitive and emotional development, and long-term academic achievement. These programs have been shown to generate a cost-benefit ratio of 3.15:1, meaning that for every \$1 invested, Ohio could expect to realize \$3.15 in savings.



Additionally, financial stability is a critical factor in ensuring families can provide safe and nurturing environments for their young children. The child tax credit proposal in House Bill 96 is an evidence-based approach that could significantly reduce childhood poverty, improve family well-being, and give parents the resources they need to support their children's early development. When families have the financial security to meet their children's needs, we see better health outcomes, stronger educational achievement, and long-term economic benefits.

One area not fully addressed by Governor DeWine in his budget proposal is the need to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health providers. While we are pleased with the proposed increased funding for Mobile Response Stabilization Services, Ohio must do more to sustain and strengthen its behavioral health workforce. Two years ago, an important step was taken with a 12.5% increase in Medicaid rates for community behavioral health services, but this still falls short of the 20% increase that was needed. The proposed budget sustains current rates but does not advance the necessary investment to address ongoing workforce shortages and ensure that children and families can access timely, high-quality behavioral health care.

The need for increased behavioral health support is more pressing than ever. Today, **1 in 4 Americans** report needing mental health or substance use services, yet too many Ohioans struggle to access care due to a lack of available providers. In high schools across the country, **53% of girls and 27% of boys** experience symptoms consistent with major depression. A 2021 survey by Nationwide Children's Hospital found that **53% of working parents miss work at least once a month** due to their child's mental health needs, placing financial strain on families and employers alike. Additionally, caregiving for a person with a serious mental health disability requires an average of **32 hours per week**—essentially a full-time job.

The economic toll of untreated mental health and substance use disorders is staggering. Nationally, the U.S. forfeits nearly **\$300 billion in GDP annually** due to lost productivity, absenteeism, and reduced workforce participation. Employers bear a heavy burden as well, spending over **\$2,800 more per employee annually** on healthcare costs, **\$4,700 in lost workdays**, and **\$5,700 per year in turnover-related expenses**. If Ohio is serious about strengthening its economy and attracting new businesses, investing in community behavioral health is not optional—it is essential. Without competitive Medicaid reimbursement rates, we will continue to see long wait times, provider shortages, and families left without the mental health services they need to thrive.



In closing, the Governor should be applauded for his budget that follows the evidence and expands home visiting, invests in early childhood education, and supports parents of young children with the new refundable child tax credit. The House can improve on this strong budget by prioritizing strengthening Medicaid reimbursement for behavioral health providers. These are all critical strategies to improve the health and well-being of Ohio's youngest residents. Public investment in these proven programs will create lasting benefits for children, families, and our entire state. I urge you to support House Bill 96 and ensure that more Ohio families have access to the tools they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jill Miller'.

Jill Miller
President & CEO