

Bridget Tharp
Personal Testimony (NYAP Foster Parent)

March 11, 2025

Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

Chairperson White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and
Members of the House Children and Human Services Committee:

My name is Bridget Tharp, and I am a foster parent from Columbus, Ohio. I am here today to urge you to prioritize life-changing investments in childcare for foster families with House Bill 7.

As someone who spent half of my salary on childcare during my first foster placement in 2021 and continues to foster children, I deeply feel the potential of this proposal. With neighboring states Indiana and Pennsylvania already offering the benefit of publicly funded childcare to foster families for many years, I am grateful that our Ohio lawmakers are finally considering the same.

In 2021 I was a brand new single foster parent. I agreed to care for an adorable sibling set: three sisters who were aged five and younger. The golden girls, their favorite babysitter called them. I was incredibly lucky that my nonprofit fundraising job at the Mid-Ohio Food Collective was very understanding and flexible by allowing me to go part-time for the first 30 days I had the golden girls - but longer term I would not be effective at my job without childcare. The golden girls were very high-need: they had experienced homelessness and the near-death health crisis of a parent. They had incredible separation anxiety. I used a variety of childcare during the year I cared for the sisters, including in-home babysitting, occasional volunteer babysitters from the foster community, the nonprofit childcare Columbus Early Learning Centers and in-home Early Headstart - which was the most affordable but also the most limiting and difficult option. I remember that childcare for the golden girls that year was \$36,000, because it was exactly half of my salary.

To any legislators who are against this proposal because foster parents receive the childcare tax credit, I challenge you to consider my experience. Because my golden girls' parent fraudulently

claimed them on their 2021 taxes, I did not receive the tax credits I was entitled to for the full year I fostered them. I chose not to pursue legal action because I stayed involved with the golden girls for 18 months after reunification. And anyway, my support group taught me that tax nonsense like this is common practice in foster care. Consider that my partner and I are now fostering 6-year-old twin boys, and this year their county's children service agency refuses to provide me with the information required to claim them on my taxes (which our 7 months fostering them allows us to do by federal law.) From my experience, childcare tax credits are out of reach for foster parents.

Please pass this bill. Your investment in childcare for foster families will create a strong educational foundation for our foster children and will support recruiting more foster families like mine. Thank you.