

Testimony in Support of House Bill 7

Submitted by Taylor Thorpe

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Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

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

I first want to express my gratitude for the ongoing efforts to improve Ohio's foster care system. As a foster parent and Vice President of Honey from the Rock – Cleveland's First Foster Care Closet, I experience firsthand the challenges foster and kinship caregivers face daily. I am writing today in strong support of House Bill 7, which guarantees publicly funded child care (PFCC) for foster and kinship caregivers.

I currently pay \$640/week for my 3 children experiencing foster care. We caregivers step up when no one else will, offering love, stability, and hope to children in crisis. But too many people are forced to say no, not because they lack the heart, but because they lack the financial means for child care. No child should lose a safe home over a preventable barrier. House Bill 7 isn't just policy—it's a commitment to Ohio's most vulnerable children and the families fighting to keep them safe. This bill directly addresses that barrier by ensuring that foster and kinship caregivers have access to child care regardless of income.

Why This Bill Matters:

- **Increases Foster Placement Stability** – Foster children, especially infants and toddlers, need routine and security. Ensuring access to licensed child care reduces placement disruptions by allowing caregivers to work or attend necessary training without financial strain.
- **Supports Working and Studying Caregivers** – Many foster and kinship caregivers are employed or furthering their education to improve their families' financial security. Without guaranteed child care, they may be forced to decline placements or leave the workforce, limiting their ability to provide care.
- **Encourages More Families to Foster** – The fear of not being able to afford child care is a major deterrent for potential foster families. By guaranteeing PFCC, we can expand the pool of available homes, especially for young children who are the hardest to place.

- **Provides Equitable Support** – Foster caregivers are taking on a critical role in child welfare, yet under current law, their access to child care assistance is uncertain. This bill ensures that foster and kinship caregivers receive the same level of support as other families in need.

We already see successful models of similar support systems. Programs like WIC and free school lunches do not have income qualifications for foster parents, ensuring that children in care have access to essential nutrition. By applying this same principle to child care, we can help ensure that foster and kinship caregivers are not burdened with an unnecessary financial barrier while providing stable homes for children in need. Just as WIC and school meal programs acknowledge the unique needs of foster children, PFCC should do the same.

In my work with foster families and as a foster parent, I have seen too many potential placements fall through due to the lack of child care assistance. When I inquired about why a placement for a child I knew was disrupted, the agency responded, “They could not afford child care.” House Bill 7 is a necessary step toward removing this obstacle and creating a more stable, supportive environment for Ohio’s foster children.

I help run Cleveland’s only foster care closet because I believe no caregiver should have to choose between financial stability and providing a safe, loving home for a child in need. Now, it’s your turn to break down barriers and ensure every foster family has the support they deserve. Pass House Bill 7.

Sincerely,

Taylor Thorpe

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