

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share today in support of House Bill number 7. My name is Brittany Ganssarto, and I have been a foster parent in Montgomery County, Ohio, since 2018. I am deeply passionate about fostering, and I want to share my story to help illustrate why this bill is so important for foster families like mine.

After completing my education and field experience, I decided it was time to pursue a decades-long passion of mine: opening my home to children in need. I spent a lot of time researching and speaking with various agencies—both county and private—to ensure I was well-prepared. At the time, I was a single 27-year-old woman, and I had to carefully consider whether I could provide the stability and care a child would need. Could I offer a safe, nurturing environment? Did I have a support network? Was my home and car suitable for a child? And most importantly, how would I manage childcare while working 40 to 45 hours a week?

As any foster parent knows, childcare is a significant concern. The financial realities of fostering quickly became clear. When I became licensed in 2019, I learned that I could receive a small reimbursement for childcare costs, but it never came close to covering the full expense. The reimbursement rate was \$115 per week, and the per diem for each child was \$21 per day. For me to "break even" and afford childcare, I needed to find daycare services that cost around \$262 per week.

In April 2019, I received my first placement: a newborn baby boy. I was immediately faced with a long list of expenses—diapers, clothes, bottles, formula, and much more. The reimbursement didn't cover these costs, and I quickly learned that foster parents often have to dig deep into their own pockets to meet these needs. I found a daycare near my home that was highly recommended and cost \$175 per week for full-time care. While my first placement thrived at this daycare, I was left with only \$87 per week to cover the child's other needs.

As I continued fostering, childcare costs continued to rise. By the time I had my fourth placement in 2023, the same daycare had increased its rates to \$330 per week. This meant that I was now paying out of pocket for a portion of the childcare and all of the child's other needs. In total, I was spending over \$350 each month on childcare, plus additional costs for the child's care. As a single-income foster parent, this financial burden became overwhelming, especially given the current inflationary pressures.

I am employed by a church, so while I can meet my personal needs, I don't have a significant income. Despite my passion for fostering, it became clear that in order to continue, I would have to go into substantial debt—something that isn't sustainable in the long term. In July 2023, I adopted my first foster child, but the cost of childcare is now a major roadblock to accepting additional placements, especially sibling groups, which are in high demand.

To put it plainly, it is unrealistic for me to continue fostering while incurring over \$4,800 in debt each year per child just for childcare. This issue is not unique to me. Many foster parents in

Ohio are facing the same challenge. It's a growing problem that will likely cause some to stop taking in children altogether, which would be a tragic loss for the children who need us the most.

While I understand that Title 20 funding exists, it is based on the foster family's income. This approach is different from other programs like healthcare or WIC, which base eligibility for benefits on the child's zero income. For babies, in particular, this means that all medical expenses, formula, and early childhood nutrition are covered in full. This financial relief allows foster parents to focus on providing the best care possible.

The same principle should apply to childcare. Making childcare free for children in foster care would ease the financial burden on foster parents, allowing us to continue providing loving, stable homes for these children. Additionally, childcare provides crucial developmental benefits for foster children, especially those in their early years. It offers a safe and structured environment, where children can form important routines, develop social skills, and experience the care and nurturing that every child deserves.

Please know that there are many foster parents in Ohio who share my concerns. We are passionate about providing safe and loving homes for children in crisis, but the financial strain is becoming too much to bear. If we want to continue opening our hearts and homes to children in need, we must address the financial barriers that make fostering unsustainable.

Thank you for your time and for considering this important issue. I urge you to support Bill 96 to help ensure that fostering remains a viable option for families who want to make a difference in the lives of children in need.