

Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee & Members of the Committee:

My name is Trisha Clark and I am a kinship caregiver and small business owner from Columbus, Ohio. I am urging you to pass House Bill 7 and ensure that foster and kinship caregivers receive the child care support they need to provide stable, loving homes for Ohio's most vulnerable children.

One night, I got a police call that changed everything. My two grandchildren needed a safe place to live due to extreme domestic violence. I learned that the abuse had been happening for years, alongside addiction and untreated mental illness.

I made daily calls for help, documenting everything, pleading for resources. In response, I received a one-time stipend from children's services and just \$400 a month to cover both children's needs. That barely covered food, let alone therapy, clothing, or medical costs. We were lucky to be approved for Medicaid. I can't even imagine our lives without that support. I had to piece together help on my own, finding Alicia's Closet and the Clintonville-Beechwold Community Resource Center (CRC), which were godsend—but why did I have to fight so hard just to keep these children safe? Why are small non-profits handling the brunt of support?

I started my own landscaping business, Pollination Gardens, so I could continue working while caring for my grandchildren—both of whom have PTSD and ADHD. But even as I built a business to survive, I was denied child care assistance. When I suffered a severe knee injury and needed surgery, I was told I could only qualify for child care if I worked full-time or went back to school. How was I supposed to go back to school while recovering? How was I supposed to work full-time when my grandchildren needed therapy, stability, and care? I begged for help—and got nothing.

Kinship caregivers like me receive only a fraction of the financial support foster parents do, despite providing the same critical care. Foster parents receive monthly stipends, additional funds for clothing and activities, and often full Medicaid coverage for children. Kinship caregivers? Just \$400 per month for two kids, compared to the substantial support foster parents receive. We are doing the same work as foster parents, yet left to struggle alone. This disparity is not

just unfair—it actively harms children by making it harder for willing relatives to provide stable, loving homes.

The fentanyl epidemic has left an entire generation of children displaced. We step up because it is the right thing to do, but without child care, without summer programs, without respite, how are we supposed to keep going?

I urge you to pass House Bill 7 and provide kinship caregivers with the child care assistance we need to support Ohio's children. This investment will not only stabilize families but also strengthen Ohio's workforce and economy by enabling caregivers to continue working while ensuring children receive the care they deserve.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

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