

I am Rev. Carrie Finegan. My husband and I have been licensed foster parents for four years with NYAP in Franklin County. All told we have cared for 11 kiddos in the past four years, including one infant/toddler who was with us for 2 years. We currently have two kiddos under 5 in our care, in addition to our Kindergarten-aged biological child. This issue directly affects our family as we thus far have exclusively cared for children who require childcare.

I am asking you to fully fund House Bill 7. When we moved to Ohio we were shocked to discover that childcare is not covered for foster or kinship parents. We are both employed full time and when we started fostering our bio child was 2 years old and in full-time daycare. Due to the lack of childcare funding, we only opened our home to one child at a time. Our bio child's daycare costs were around \$1300/month. Daycare for each child we took in also cost around \$1300/month, yet the stipend amounted to approximately \$800/month. I asked multiple daycares if they would give us the Title 20 rate for our foster kiddos but none were willing to do so. Our entire stipend went to childcare, plus \$500/month of our own income. WIC subsidized some of our formula cost, and some of the kiddos received a one-time clothing voucher, but everything else was funded by us. That means formula, diapers, wipes, clothing, food, activities, travel, and everything else a child requires.

As our two-year placement moved into toddler-hood we provided her with the same experiences as our biological child. We paid for swimming lessons, tumbling classes, and approved travel out of state (where we made a point to visit her biological sibling). We did all of this because it was the right thing to do, and we are privileged enough to have the financial resources to make it work. But what about all of the kinship and foster families who do not have those resources? Our two-year placement is now with kinship, along with an infant sibling. Her

kinship family does not receive nearly the same level of financial resources as we did when we fostered (i.e. daily stipend) and certainly cannot afford childcare for two young children.

Increasing childcare resources not only benefits foster families but makes it more likely that kinship families will step forward to safely keep children in their families of origin.

For our current placement, the youngest is in preschool for around \$1200/month and the other is in a before/after school program for around \$700/month. This does not include the days that school is closed and we need to pay an additional daily fee for the older child to attend. Due to their level of care, their combined stipend totals around \$2600/month. The "extra" \$700 goes toward tumbling classes, clothing and shoes, hair products, therapeutic play materials, memberships (e.g. COSI) and other needs, not to mention food and toys and other things young children need. This past weekend we spent \$650 of our own money on beds and mattresses because they outgrew the beds that we have.

Increasing access to childcare for foster and kinship parents improves workforce participation, allows stipend funds to be put back into the economy, increases the likelihood of children remaining with kinship care, and increases the pool of foster parents when there is not a safe kinship option. I implore you to prioritize funding for young children and families, especially for potential kinship families. I am grateful for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carrie Finegan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Carrie Finegan