



Ohio Children's Alliance

Leading change for child and family service providers

House Children and Human Services Committee

March 11, 2024

Proponent Testimony on HB 7

Ohio Children's Alliance Testimony on HB 7

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

My name is Kate Rossman, and I am the Policy Manager at the Ohio Children's Alliance. The Ohio Children's Alliance is a trade and advocacy association representing 90+ community organizations providing behavioral health, foster care, and family support services across Ohio. We also partner with state agencies, foundations, and businesses to administer statewide family-serving programs and provide learning and development opportunities for children services professionals. All of our work is united by a common purpose: expanding our system of care and producing better outcomes for a stronger Ohio.

I am here in strong support of House Bill 7, legislation that would extend publicly funded childcare benefits to foster and kinship caregivers. This bill is critical in supporting the families who provide stability, love, and care to Ohio's most vulnerable children.

One of the most pressing barriers for foster and kinship caregivers is access to affordable childcare. Foster parents are expected to provide safe and nurturing environments while also balancing work and other responsibilities.

Ohio requires foster parents to prove that they have an income sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household and to make their timely monthly payments without relying on their foster care per diems. While this requirement helps to ensure that foster parents have a stable financial foundation, it highlights the additional pressure our families face to utilize childcare because most of them work. In addition to work, in-person training and support groups are vital components in preparing and sustaining foster families.

However, the cost of childcare, averaging between \$9,580 and \$12,351 per year in Ohio¹, creates a significant financial burden for these families. Without access to publicly funded childcare, many foster parents are forced to leave the workforce or struggle to find reliable care options, which can ultimately impact placement stability for children.

Retention of Foster Parents: Data from the "Foster Care in Focus" Report

We are facing a foster care recruitment and retention crisis and we are currently losing more foster parents than we take in. Why do our foster parents stop fostering? Many leave due to financial and logistical challenges, including childcare access. The It Takes

¹ <https://www.groundworkohio.org/post/the-rising-cost-of-child-care-in-ohio>

Heart's *Foster Care in Focus* report, which aggregated data from current and former foster parents on their experiences, highlights why childcare is an important solution to keep good foster parents:

- **56% of former caregivers said lack of support was a key reason they stopped fostering.**
- **45% of current caregivers reported that financial strain is a major challenge.**
- **Childcare was cited as a major barrier to continuing as a foster caregiver.²**

Publicly funded childcare would remove a significant financial and logistical barrier, allowing more families to continue fostering and increasing stability for kids in care.

Publicly funded childcare is essential not only for supporting foster parents but also for promoting the well-being of children in foster care. Kids in care typically come into care with a history of trauma and instability, making access to quality, structured environments crucial. According to the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), children who participate in high-quality early education programs exhibit notable improvements in social-emotional development, school readiness, and long-term outcomes.

These programs provide stable, nurturing environments that are particularly beneficial for children who have experienced adversity, helping to mitigate the negative impacts of early trauma and setting the foundation for future success.

House Bill 7 is an investment in Ohio's foster care system which would help to remove a key barrier to retention and improve developmental outcomes for children. Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and Members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on HB 7. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you,

Kate Rossman
Manager, Policy
Ohio Children's Alliance
Kate.Rossman@ohiochildrensalliance.org

² <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/jfs.ohio.gov/OFC/FosterCareInFocusFosterParentSurveyReport.pdf>