

State of Ohio House Bill 7 hearing statement

Thank you State Representatives Ray and Wright for sponsoring this bill.

Greetings, my name is Linnae Boyer, and I am a foster and adoptive parent.

My husband and I have been licensed foster parents for 5 and a half years. We had 4 children of our own when we began and opened our home to teens because I had professional experience and felt more capable of managing children in that age range. At the time, our original's ages were 9, 7, 6 and 9 months old. Our agency knew that we were open to teens only and most certainly not infants.

So imagine our surprise when we received a call in January from a county agency telling us that the mom of one of children, whom I will call Sharee had just given birth to a baby. We thought it was a joke. Everyone knew we didn't want any babies. But in this moment my husband and I knew, that we just couldn't say no. You see, Sharee had recently received the devastating news that she would not be reunited with her siblings despite the fact that they had spent their whole lives together. She was reeling, and we were too. This phone call felt like a gift. We both knew immediately that we could not deny her another sibling connection. We had less than an hour to give them our answer and less than 24 hours before we would pick him up from the hospital. My head was spinning. But our answer was clear.

Our children are now: 15, 15, 13, 12, 6 and 9 weeks old. Thankfully, I qualified for parental leave from work since he was an infant so I have been able to be home with him. We knew we wouldn't qualify for PFCC, but thought it was possible that the voucher program would be the safety net we needed to help pay for childcare. Afterall, we have a pretty large family. After several applications and 4 plus hours on the phone or in the ODJFS office, I learned that we missed the income cut off by 2 percent. 2 percent!! My family of 8! We didn't know what to do. The childcare centers near us were charging 360 to 375 dollars a week for infant care. We can't afford for me to stop working or even move to part time employment. While part-time income would ensure we qualified for childcare assistance, our household would be harmed by the decrease. Then I recalled that children in foster care qualify for Early Head Start! Score! I explored this option and even found a center I liked. But then I learned that because our family did not qualify for PFCC or the voucher program they could not accept our baby into Early Head Start program. Even though his foster care status qualified him, our family status was over income and their 2 spaces for over income foster families were already filled.

Well, currently our hands are tied. I work as a recruiter for foster parents and a supporter of kinship families. I have explained this reality to many prospective parents, that they need to be prepared to cover the cost of child care even with a foster care per diem in place. For Kinship families, I'm often supporting them by listening to their frustrations about the many costs for their children landing squarely on their shoulders. I joined a group 2 years ago, advocating for legislators to create a childcare subsidy for children in foster/kinship care. I knew it was important to others, but I didn't expect it to be my life, remember, we only took teens.

I've had to extend my leave at work to use all 12 weeks instead of 7. Thank God it is paid leave. My employer has been accommodating and supportive, but that doesn't change the reality that in a few weeks I will need to be fully present to my obligations as an employee even if I am working from home. Our little guy, whom I will call Timothy, was very much unexpected, but is an absolute blessing and we wouldn't change a thing. Having him, however, means I am carrying a lot of weight around wondering how my husband and I will provide for our family with this unforeseen cost of 1500 plus dollars a month to make sure he is in a safe and nurturing place while we work to make a living.

I am asking for your support with creating a subsidy with limited hoops to jump through for families. Even though I knew we would not qualify for PFCC, we were required to apply to that program and be rejected to be considered for the voucher program. I didn't have a choice but to walk through that process. This isn't just affecting my family or my Timothy. I know many families that no longer accept children under the age of 5 strictly based on the cost of childcare. These families would love to be raising little ones, but aren't left with viable options, so they say no to the placements. And in my case, saying no would have meant denying Timothy and Sharee the opportunity to have a sibling connection in this system where so many are traumatized through separation.