

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Cynthia Swafford, and I am a foster and adoptive parent from Montgomery County. I'm also a social worker providing mental health support to families in my community. I am here today to urge you to prioritize fully funded childcare for foster and kinship youth in Ohio's upcoming state budget.

My family has fostered 32 children over the past 15 years. In 2019, I entered the workforce, and our family was forced to reconsider available beds to care for foster children due to the cost of needed childcare.

We have been forced to turn down many placements for children under the age of 5 because we simply could not afford the expense of childcare.

In Montgomery County, foster parents are eligible for reimbursement for qualified childcare costs, up to \$115 per week. The average cost of daycare for a child under 2 is around \$250 per week. That is a difference of \$540 per month. A monthly board rate for a county foster home is \$635. This leaves only \$95 to cover all other expenses for the child in care.

In Montgomery Co, these funds are available to foster homes for children in foster care. Many other counties don't even offer partial childcare assistance for working foster families. This significantly impacts available homes for foster placements.

Across the state, resources available to kinship families to aid with childcare are even less.

As you consider this funding option, I implore you to consider the youth in Ohio who are already facing the uncertainty of disruption from their parents. Fully funded childcare options would open more opportunities for these youth to stay connected to family members who otherwise could not afford daycare. It also supports foster families like ours who have given their lives to youth in need with access to funded quality childcare while we work.