

## **Testimony in Support of House Bill 7**

### **House Children and Human Services Committee**

#### **Presented by Jessica & Sabrina Holman, Family Action Network Parent Advocate**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of **House Bill 7**.

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Our names are **Sabrina Holman** and **Jessica Holman**, and we are **Family Action Network Parent Advocates** with **Groundwork Ohio**, a statewide, nonpartisan public-policy research and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every young child in Ohio has access to high-quality early learning and healthy development opportunities.

We are the proud kinship caregivers of our nephew, Austin. In his short four years, Austin has already experienced more trauma than most young children. He was there when his mother, our sister, tragically passed away from an overdose at just 28 years old. She didn't know the marijuana she was smoking was laced with fentanyl.

Before that heartbreaking day in March 2022, Austin often lacked stable housing, as his mother was in and out of homeless shelters and an abusive relationship. After her death, Austin was placed with our mother, his maternal grandmother. However, she was also struggling financially and emotionally. Following a stressful year-long court battle between our mother, Austin's biological father, and ourselves, we were finally awarded full custody.

Today, Austin is thriving in our home. He is now in his second year of preschool and is affectionately known as "Aus the Boss," a nickname lovingly given to him by our family. Despite all he has endured, Austin remains a happy and energetic child. We work every day to ensure he knows how much his mother loved him. We keep her memory alive in our home by reminding him that, "Your mommy is in heaven, and you can always talk to her."

Although Austin has not shown concerning behaviors at school or at home yet, we know that as he grows and processes his grief, he may need counseling and additional supports. We are committed to ensuring he gets everything he needs to heal and succeed.

As kinship caregivers, we stepped into this role out of love, but we also faced the sudden and overwhelming financial burden that comes with raising a young child. Child care alone

is incredibly expensive — in Ohio, full-time infant care averages \$12,351 per year and toddler care averages \$11,125. These costs are often higher than a mortgage payment.

House Bill 7 is critical for families like ours. By making foster and kinship caregivers eligible for publicly funded child care, the bill would:

- **Reduce financial stress** on families who open their hearts and homes to vulnerable children.
- **Encourage more people** to step forward as foster or kinship caregivers by easing the heavy financial burden associated with raising a child.
- **Promote stability** for children who have already experienced trauma, ensuring they can access high-quality early learning opportunities that support their long-term development.

We deeply appreciate the leadership of Representatives White and Ray for recognizing the urgent needs of foster and kinship families. We urge this committee to pass House Bill 7 so that more families like ours can continue to provide safe, stable, and nurturing homes for Ohio's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.