



Center FOR Christian Virtue

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Chairman Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and esteemed members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 262. My name is Ryan Folz, and I serve as Legislative Liaison for the Center for Christian Virtue, Ohio's largest Christian Public Policy organization.

Ohio currently recognizes and celebrates dozens of commemorative days and weeks honoring professions, causes, and cultural contributions. These designations matter because they send symbolic messages about what our state values. HB262 is a simple extension of that practice—but it is also one of the most important symbolic acts this body can take. This bill acknowledges the central truth that intact, natural families—married mothers and fathers raising their biological children together in a monogamous relationship—are the foundation of healthy communities. Research consistently shows that when families are strong, communities are strong. When families break down, the costs ripple through our schools, our courts, our healthcare systems, and our neighborhoods through crime and poverty.

Unfortunately, Ohio reflects many of the national challenges in family formation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 data, only about 46 percent of children in Ohio live with their married biological parents, compared to nearly 80 percent in the 1960s. At the same time, based on our research done in conjunction with the Institute for Family Studies, a concerning 42 percent of Ohio children are born to unmarried parents—which is well below the national average.¹ In some of our largest urban counties, including Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton, this percentage is even larger at more than 50 percent of children. In these same counties, the percentage of mothers who are married averages in the low 30s. These numbers matter because marriage is directly correlated with child well-being measures, such as poverty rate and educational attainment. Research we conducted shows that across ALL races, the child poverty rate for children raised by single mothers in our state is 45 percent, or at a rate of nearly half of all children raised by single mothers; This is remarkably greater than the child poverty rate for children raised by married families at only 7%, or one in 14.² Looking at education, we see that children from non-intact families are more likely to be reported for behavioral issues, suffer from learning challenges, be at greater risk of being held back a grade, and suffer from lower high school graduation rates compared to children from intact families. It is clear that children thrive when they are raised by their married, biological parents.

¹ National Vital Statistics Reports. Births, Final 2022. Volume 73, No. 2, April 4, 2024. Table I-7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

² Bureau, U. C. (2025, September 4). *American Community Survey (ACS)*. Census.gov. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.htm> Scholars and lawmakers frequently discuss how to address declining marriage and



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Scholars and lawmakers frequently discuss how to address birth rates and the rising challenges facing families. HB262 is certainly not an overnight fix for our issues, but it does provide a meaningful step forward. By establishing a Natural Family Month, Ohio will send a strong public signal that married, natural families are valued and should be celebrated. It will also provide our communities with a platform to highlight the benefits of family stability, and it will encourage young people to see marriage and family as worthy and attainable goals. Just as we designate months to promote cancer awareness or honor veterans, we should set aside time to promote strong, natural families and continue this important conversation in Ohio.

At the Center for Christian Virtue, we are leading our own statewide marriage and family efforts in collaboration with Ohio churches and community organizations. HB262 complements these efforts and others throughout our state by showing what our state and its leadership values. This bill costs nothing to taxpayers, requires no complex bureaucracy, and creates no new regulations. It simply affirms that the natural family—children being raised by their biological married mother and father—should be celebrated and in doing so, positions Ohio as a leader in putting families first.

As Ohio grapples with other large, complex policy questions one thing is clear: family stability is the common denominator across every societal issue. HB262 is not the end of the conversation, but an essential starting point. By passing this bill, you will send a powerful message that Ohio is a state that honors marriage, celebrates natural families, and prioritizes children's well-being. State leadership has taken significant steps to promote and strengthen our families— and it should now take this straightforward step in passing HB262 to continue the work in making Ohio the best state in the nation for families. Thank you for allowing me the time to speak on this bill, and thank you to the bill sponsors. I am happy to answer any questions.