



**Testimony on H.B. 96 Operating Budget for SFY 2026-2027
House Children and Human Services Committee**

March 11, 2025

**Natalie A. Leek, President & CEO
Providence House, Inc.
Cuyahoga County**

Chairman Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for House Bill 96.

My name is Natalie Leek and I am the President & CEO of Providence House, a Children's Crisis Care Facility in Cuyahoga County that is Ohio's first and one of the nation's largest and longest operating Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries.

Ohio's licensed Children's Crisis Care Facilities (Crisis Nurseries), Providence House in Cuyahoga County and Blessing House in Lorain County, offer critical support to families to help keep children safe, resolve family crises to keep families together, and prevent foster care placements.

Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries provide free, non-custodial emergency children's shelter and direct care for up to 90 days for children newborn through 12-years-old whose families (typically single moms) are experiencing crises such as homelessness, domestic violence, mental health or addiction crisis, or who live in unsafe situations that put their children at risk for abuse or neglect. While staying with us children remain in their parent's custody, as we focus on delivering crisis intervention and family preservation services to the parent/guardian to stabilize and reunite the family.

Both Providence House and Blessing House have doubled capacity in recent years to meet the growing needs of families with young children. With our recent expansions, there will be a 30% increase in the number of available Crisis Nursery beds in the state in 2025 to address the growing needs of families in crisis with young children.

While our expansions will benefit more children and families, demand for Family Preservation Crisis Nursery services continues to outpace our ability to serve families in need. Last year 691 children were placed on our waiting list or went completely unserved due to lack of space at Providence House. Blessing House also has growing waiting lists for their services.

Crisis Nurseries are trusted community resources that have demonstrated remarkable results as a national model of care for child abuse prevention, family preservation, and diversion from foster care. In the last ten years, Providence House has successfully reunited 98% of families using our services after addressing factors causing instability and resolving crises. Nearly 80% of the parents self-refer and were system involved themselves. They are striving to break this cycle for their own children. By helping them, and preventing foster care placements, Ohio's Crisis Nurseries save millions in dollars in foster care costs by preserving families. With the expansion of our services through a new East Side Providence House Campus, these savings will double.

Ohio's licensed Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries, Providence House and Blessing House, are grateful to have received critical state support in previous budget cycles. The two licensed Children's

Crisis Care

Facilities share line item **830419 Children's Crisis Care currently funded at \$1.235M per fiscal year. We are respectfully requesting a modest increase to \$1.35M per fiscal year.** The increase will directly allow us to serve more families, keep up with rising costs of care, and directly address the state's foster care crisis – short and long-term.

Additionally, we offer a strong return on the state's investment by improving and stabilizing long-term family well-being. Families involved in Providence House programs and services are more likely to experience increases in employment, income, housing permanency, and education attainment. The average length of stay for a child at Providence House is only 33 days compared to 13 months for a child in an Ohio foster home, increasing the likelihood of family permanency and bonding.

Beyond Providence House and Blessing House, there is strong interest and significant need for replicating our model across Ohio counties that hope to reproduce our model to support families and reduce foster care placements. I have spoken with leaders and organizations in Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Summit Counties who have expressed a significant need for a Family Preservation Crisis Nursery in their communities and hope to replicate our model. With that in mind, **we are respectfully requesting consideration of support for \$500,000 through the new Ohio Department of Children and Youth to conduct a feasibility study** to identify Ohio communities that are prepared to support a Family Preservation Crisis Nursery for their local families. Providence House has recently been contracted for similar feasibility work by the City of San Antonio, Texas to support their efforts to launch this program in their community. This work is a clear testament to the need and value of these programs locally and nationally.

Over the past 44 years, Providence House has kept over 16,000 Ohio children safe and their families together. We are licensed by the Ohio Department of Children and Youth as a Children's Crisis Care Facility and certified qualified residential treatment program (QRTP). We are CARF accredited, an OMHAS and Medicaid certified behavioral health provider, recognized as a trusted community resource and an awarded national leader in child abuse prevention, family preservation, and proactive alternative to foster care. Last year, our program was also recognized as the first Family Preservation Crisis Nursery in the nation to be listed as a Research-informed Evidence Based Practice in the national California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.

Please consider your investment in Ohio's Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries over the next biennium and demonstrate your commitment to the state's agenda for children, youth, and families by supporting innovative programs like Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries that help at-risk families experiencing crises to reduce the number of children entering foster care and keep Ohio's children safe and families together.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration of my request to support the vital work done at Ohio's Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries. I am happy to answer any questions.

Natalie A. Leek
President and CEO
Providence House