



Good morning Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee.

My name is James McDougal, and I am proud to be the Vice Chair of the Families Flourish Board of Directors. Today, I am here to request that you support continued funding for Families Flourish as we are currently in the State budget and are in the Governor's recommended appropriation. This is so that we can further our life-changing mission that first moves families to safety, then supports them as they move towards higher paying employment opportunities.

First, a thank you for State dollars passed in 2023. The line items that support our work to connect low-wage families to better-paying workforce jobs has been money well spent. We are so grateful. Those funds have helped us nearly double the number of people we are serving which will soon be 100 families admitted into our program, and it has helped us to create the tools to take our results to other communities so that they may become an affiliate and utilize our impactful and unique model. The first will open this year and we are in other conversations with other Ohio cities looking to adopt our transformative program.

We are grateful to be in the current, as introduced, budget which needs a corrective amendment on line item number 830402 to add our name, Families Flourish. We are proud to be working with Governor DeWine's office on the amendment and appreciate this Committee's consideration.

Families Flourish was founded with the goal of helping parents of young children move from lower-resourced areas to higher-resourced areas. Families Flourish makes market rate rental housing affordable by providing limited rental support in neighborhoods that offer access to opportunities, such as higher-resourced schools, safer neighborhoods, employment, and other indicators of opportunities. We are a private-public partnership with over 20 landlords in the region working with us, and we focus on education so that the children can grow up to become part of the economic fabric of the community.

Families Flourish was created as a pilot with faculty in the City and Regional Planning program at The Ohio State University with community members and organizations from across Central Ohio. OSU researchers evaluate our unique-in-the-nation approach to ending poverty.

The headline outcome for our 10-family pilot with OSU is that our moms raised their incomes by 58% or \$17,000 on average. That allowed our graduates to take on market-rate rent without any subsidy when their program concluded.

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Our submitted testimony has more information about our pilot and current outcomes, and a description of our program. I would like to introduce you to one of our wonderful graduates, Tehani Morales, who is here to tell you about how Families Flourish impacted her and her children.

Thank you, James.

My three children and I entered the program in 2018 as part of the OSU pilot. My youngest was 3 at the time, my oldest 12. We lived in a home where I was terrified our youngest was going to fall through a loose stair that my landlord refused to fix. My older had her own room in the basement, until she discovered it was crawling with cockroaches and mice.

Moving into a safer neighborhood and a healthy home through Families Flourish was just the start for our family. My oldest found choir and flag corps and theater, she quickly made friends. My middle – a son – learned that he had talent for wrestling, and the coach has become a mentor and family friend. The youngest – we call her “Bug” – is very outgoing, so she quickly had people at the apartment community, the school, Girls Scouts and dance.

For me, I was able to discover how to use my bachelor's in human resources and get a job with more pay, good benefits and flexibility for my family. I think the biggest thing I got from coaching and programs was confidence. This time last year – nearly two years after my family graduated from Families Flourish – I decided to successfully take and pass the Law School Admission Test, apply and begin law school. I had wanted to be an attorney since I was in middle school, and with the attitude that I can accomplish anything I put my mind to, I'm now taking classes at Cleveland State University.

[The Families Flourish pilot had a major impact on all of the families involved.](#)

Additionally, we saw far fewer trips to emergency rooms for children who had been suffering asthma and other upper respiratory ailments when they were in unsafe, unhealthy housing and neighborhoods. We estimate that just among the 18 children in our pilot, those fewer ER trips alone resulted in estimated healthcare savings of \$75,000 over four years.

In July 2024, a new set of interviews with 9 of these 10 families revealed continued increased income two years after the program ended, averaging 18% higher wages since graduation from Families Flourish.

We continue to be evaluated by Ohio State and by Measurement Resources, a Columbus data company. In fact, the results from the pilot seen above seem to have replicability. The latest report from our OSU evaluation team shows:

- 67% of the respondents reported an income increase on average of \$4.85 per hour (\$9,700 per year based on full-time employment)
- 33% reported no increase or they reduced their income to attend school or other reasons

Our approach is unique in that we not only provide families with the tools and resources they

need to move to higher-resourced areas, but we also offer ongoing support and advocacy to help them succeed and thrive in their new communities.

Here is how the program works:

Families Flourish is built as a three-year investment in a family. It includes financial and career coaching, monthly programming and partial rental support. Three years of rental support enables families to live in healthy, quality homes in a safe, higher-resourced Central Ohio neighborhood. Studies have shown that providing access to healthy, safe, affordable housing

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alone in higher-resourced neighborhoods will not provide the pathway to economic independence to the parents of children who move. The required coaching and programs that we provide help parents to develop relationships for emotional support and family stability. We are demonstrating that by enabling families with children ages 13 and under to move into higher-resourced neighborhoods, participants will see a host of educational, social, wellness, and trauma reduction benefits.

We have seen the positive impact of our work firsthand. Families who have participated in our program have been able to improve their quality of life, access better educational opportunities for their children, and achieve financial stability for themselves.

Jameka moved just one ZIP code when she entered the Families Flourish program in the Fall of 2022, but it completely changed the way she and her son approach life. In her son's new school, third-grade reading scores are at 98% proficiency compared to his previous school, where the rate was 8%. Her son needed supports available at the new school to build confidence and get to grade level.

Her streets are safer, so she could teach her son to ride a bike for the first time – and they now can walk to school together.

Jameka went from part-time work at a school to full-time work with the City of Columbus, where she applies her knowledge of what young, single moms need to thrive. She's working in infant mortality and teaching others what she has learned about parenting and child development.

Most students engaged in extracurricular activities and many benefitted from our partnership with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The vast majority of parents indicated their children had a good or very good adjustment to their new schools with improved academic outcomes.

Our current retention rate is 90%. Today, we serve 74 families – all single moms but three, who

are two-parent families. The children are young – the majority of them under age 4. We work with 20 private landlords in 54 communities to help house and stabilize our families.

The move starts working almost immediately on kids – they have safe places to play outdoors, more resources within their schools, and they notice when their parents are less stressed.

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As our parents get settled into their new communities, we see the stress of hearing gunshots every night start to melt away. It usually takes 4-9 months for that to happen, and then we see the parents more fully engaging in the coaching the setting their goals even higher.

For Tiffany Isaac and her three children, it has meant going from temp work to a career in cyber security. Tiffany joined the Families Flourish program in August 2023. After a divorce, where her husband was the primary breadwinner, Tiffany picked up temp work and hoped to save for a house. When she was accepted into Families Flourish, she was focused on how the rent support would allow her to put down payment money away faster.

Then she started working with her coach, who encouraged her to think about her interests and career goals. Tiffany had always loved science and had taken several programs that delved into various aspects of biology and chemistry. Her coach connected her to the technology certification nonprofit Per Scholas, where she was paid to take classes qualifying her for jobs at Intel and other Ohio tech companies.

Now, Tiffany is taking additional courses to learn cybersecurity – and in the meantime, she got a flexible job with generous benefits serving inside her children's school! It gives her time to study and time to spend with her children while earning a good income.

However, our work is far from done. There are still many families in Ohio who are struggling to make ends meet and provide their children with the opportunities they deserve. With your support, we can continue to expand our reach and help even more families move to higher resourced areas.

The State's investment in Families Flourish will not only help families, but this innovative, new model will also benefit Ohio as a whole. By providing families with the resources they need to thrive, we can help to build stronger, more vibrant communities and ensure that all Ohioans have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I urge you to support Families Flourish and our mission to help parents of young children participate in our coaching and programs for economic mobility while enabling them to move from lower-resourced areas to higher-resourced areas. Your support will make a tangible difference in the lives of families across Ohio, and we are grateful for your consideration. Thank you and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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James McDougal, Vice Chair of the Board of
Directors of Families Flourish Tehani Morales,
Families Flourish Program Graduate
On behalf of Amy Klaben, President and CEO,
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