

TESTIMONY OF CHILD FOCUS
OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
May 13, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Pamela Lindeman, President and CEO of Child Focus.

Who We Are

Child Focus is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the quality of life for more than 20,000 individuals across 22 counties in central and southern Ohio. Since 1977, our programs in Early Learning and Behavioral Health have served at-risk children and adults facing poverty, family instability, justice system involvement, abuse, trauma, mental health, and substance use challenges. We respond to community needs 24/7—whether it's a mobile crisis run in the middle of the night, emergency mental health treatment to prevent suicide, or childcare and family stabilization services that keep households intact and out of the child welfare system.

Gratitude

Our Strong Families Program, which has changed the lives of hundreds of families over the past five years, would not be possible without the bipartisan support we have received from the Ohio General Assembly in the past two budgets. Recognizing the success of this program, in the last budget the G.A. appropriated \$500,000 in TANF and \$500,000 in GRF in each fiscal year to Child Focus. With these funds, Child Focus was able to serve 815 families (1,636 children and 1,137 caregivers) in Clermont, Brown, Adams, Highland, and Hamilton Counties by keeping the families together and out of foster care or homelessness and to stabilize them financially and as a family unit by keeping adults working or receiving training for a better job.

In this G.A. we are grateful to the Ohio House of Representatives for recognizing the impact of our work and appropriating \$500,000 per fiscal year through a TANF Block Grant earmark in the House-passed version of H.B. 96 to support our Strong Families Program. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Representatives Jean Schmidt, Adam Bird, and Rachel Baker for their leadership in championing this important funding to help continue our efforts to help families improve their lives.

Request to the Ohio Senate

In addition to supporting the House Passed version of this provision, we respectfully urge the Ohio Senate to adopt an amendment we have been working on with Senator Terry Johnson (SC0823) that would appropriate \$1 million in General Revenue Fund (GRF) dollars in each fiscal year for the Strong Families Program.

While TANF support is crucial, it comes with strict eligibility requirements. GRF funding helps us bridge critical gaps—supporting families who narrowly miss TANF guidelines, such as those

just above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level or households without children. These are often individuals who fall through the cracks—missing eligibility by as little as \$100–\$200 per month.

Why GRF Matters

Over the past two years, GRF dollars have been instrumental in helping families overcome sudden crises, including car repairs, housing damage, and medical emergencies. GRF also allows us to respond swiftly to children's basic needs—providing shoes, clothing, and hygiene items—without the delays often caused by documentation requirements, especially when families are unable or unwilling to produce them.

Let me share a few stories that underscore the vital role GRF plays:

- A young child in our program was seen wearing shoes with holes and no winter coat. When approached, he shared that his mother couldn't afford replacements. The parent declined to provide income documentation needed for standard aid. GRF funds allowed us to immediately provide warm clothing and proper footwear—no red tape, just action.
- An 18-year-old participant in our Parent Employment and Education Program (PEEP) aspired to become a State Tested Nursing Assistant (STNA) but lacked the financial means to enroll. Thanks to GRF, we covered her training costs. She is now progressing in her coursework and on track to graduate—building a better life for herself and her future family.
- Another 18-year-old client became homeless after being asked to leave her home upon turning 18. GRF funding enabled us to provide her with hygiene supplies and pay for a week in a hotel, which gave her the stability needed to create a transition plan. We secured her shelter placement and connected her to employment and housing services. Without GRF's flexibility, she might have ended up unsheltered.

Looking Ahead

In addition to the TANF dollars included by the House, your support for this GRF appropriation will enable Child Focus to serve more families, support our 13 Job Navigators and Parent Educators, and provide the flexible, timely help that so many Ohioans need but cannot access through traditional systems.

Chairman Cirino and members of the committee, thank you again for your time and for considering both the appropriation included in the House passed version and this amendment. We deeply appreciate the partnership and dialogue we've had with your offices on how we are able to help stabilize the lives of children and families; assist parents to become productive members of the workforce; lower dependency on government programs; and increase quality of life outcomes.

Thanks again for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.