

Senate Finance Committee
Testimony on HB 96
May 23, 2025, 2025
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Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Committee I am Ronald R. Browder with the Ohio Federation for Health Equity and Social Justice (OFHESJ). The Federation works to address disparities and promote equity in the areas of health, child welfare, juvenile justice, education and economic opportunity.

In 2021, the Federation convened and leads a National Kinship Coalition which is composed of organizations from 38 states. This coalition is committed to improving services to families in kinship care by identifying what resources are needed to improve outcomes. The coalition is made up of statewide kinship advocacy organizations, local kinship serving provider entities, community-based support group organizations and universities.

One of the Federation's major areas of focus in the child welfare space is kinship care. Kinship Care occurs when a parent or parents are not able to provide, for whatever reason, for their children and the children are cared for by another relative or family friend with close ties to the child and family. It is reported in the last US Census that over 100, 000 grandparents are caring for 200,000 relative children in Ohio. Currently the Census does not collect specific information on the number of children being cared for by aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, family friends, but we believe that number to be a significant number, though not as large as those in grandparent care.

We ask that your budget considerations also include a focus on:

- Providing resources that meet the cultural needs of caregivers
- Dedicate adequate investments to address substance abuse and mental health needs of children, parent, and kin caregivers
- Provide financial support to develop a caregiver assistance program which includes formal and informal caregivers
- Direct state policymakers to promote and foster collaborations between local, regional, and statewide groups to join in the effort to expand the use of kinship care and availability of resources to all kinship families, i.e., affordable recreational activities, caregiver and children support groups

Finally, while there has been some progress in supporting kinship families, there is still a significant disconnect in terms of support that these families have available. Significant state revenues are being saved by these families who step forward to keep their relative children from entering the system. Reducing the number of children from entering the foster care system, while helping to maintain familial

ties by ensuring that kinship families receive the services they need is critical to healthy development and will ultimately produce positive outcomes for the children.

Thank you and we appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and would be happy to discuss the need for additional kinship services support at the committee's convenience.