

*Protect Children . . .  
Strengthen Families!*

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Senate Finance Committee  
Testimony on HB 96  
June 5, 2025  
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Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this children services testimony on HB 96. My name is Sarah Newland, and I am the Executive Director of Allen County Children Services in northwest Ohio. We are a member of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, and I am here today to ask you to restore one-time funding for Child Wellness Campuses at \$20M in SFY26 and \$10M in SFY27.

As senators, you may have participated in a ridealong with a caseworker, visited the agency, or, if you are a former county commissioner, overseen the agency's important function within county government. You are also aware that many county agencies, including mine, continue to be gripped by a significant crisis in finding safe, close-to-home, appropriate placements for youth in foster care.

In some agencies, children have had to spend at least one night due to the lack of placement and treatment options for youth with multi-system, high-acuity needs. Because of this crisis, Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Director Wenthe convened a cross-system working group that identified short-term and long-term solutions to prevent children from having to stay overnight at a public children services agency. We are pleased to share that several short-term strategies have been put in place during SFY25 by DCY. We are even more pleased that in the

*IT TAKES a COMMUNITY to PROTECT a CHILD*

proposed SFY26-27 budget and in the House-passed version, there was dedicated one-time funding (\$20M/\$10M) to establish regional short-term crisis stabilization centers called **Child Wellness Campuses**. This was a long-term solution prioritized by the Children Services Placement Crisis Working Group. We ask that the Senate restore this one-time investment, as such centers are critical to keeping children from having to spend a night at a county agency; but even more so to provide de-escalation techniques to stabilize youth, much-needed behavioral health screenings, diagnostic assessments, and treatment planning. This would provide the county PCSA with the information and time to find the most appropriate placement that can meet that level of need for the youth.

In Allen County we have a 16-year-old youth in custody who is currently being hospitalized for self-harm. This youth has been involved with multiple systems including mental health and has a long history of trauma with several placement disruptions from multiple foster homes. The short-term hospital setting has informed us that she is ready for discharge; however, we have not found a suitable placement that will meet her needs and keep her safe. Rather than selecting the first placement available that will likely set her up for failure, we need to find the most appropriate placement. Access to a Child Wellness Campus would provide us with the resources to ensure we are selecting the best placement, which will prevent perpetuating further trauma.

For a number of years now, the General Assembly has supported policies to prevent custody relinquishment from occurring; this innovation would continue to support that goal. In addition, this solution was prioritized by the Children Services Placement Crisis Working Group, which includes a wide range of state agencies and state and local stakeholders. And it is supported by myself and my fellow association members, the county PCSAs. Therefore, in summary, we ask:

- **Restore the one-time investment (\$20M in SFY2026 and \$10M in SFY2027) to establish regional child wellness campuses** so that children will not have to sleep at a county agency but instead can be in a safe short-term setting (45 days) that can de-escalate and stabilize their

Am Sub HB 96 Testimony  
Sarah Newland, Allen County Children Services  
June 5, 2025

behavior while providing much-needed behavioral health screenings, diagnostic assessments, and treatment planning. We ask that you **support Amendment: SC\_136\_2803**.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.