



Good morning, Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Susan Lewis Kaylor, and I serve as the President and CEO at St. Vincent Family Services.

St. Vincent Family Services (SVFS) provides a comprehensive range of quality, trauma-informed behavioral health services for children and families in Franklin County and across the state of Ohio.

Two years ago, we identified a gap in care for our community's preschool and elementary-aged students. Thanks to your support, we're now serving 25% more children with day treatment care at St. Vincent Prep Academy, stabilizing acute behavioral challenges and preparing students for a successful transition back to a traditional school setting.

I come to you today with a request around another unmet need in our community – **early intervention** and **kindergarten readiness** for children ages 0-6. Our community's youngest children are showing up to school underprepared for learning - mentally, socially and emotionally. Many people are surprised to learn that, in Ohio, more children are expelled from preschool than from high school—often because they are simply not equipped with the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in a classroom setting. Our goal is to help prepare as many little ones for success in school and in life.

St. Vincent Family Services is a community expert in the field of evidence based

social-emotional learning services, with a specialized focus on trauma-informed care. St. Vincent Family Services' Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program has served children ages 0-6 in early learning centers and HeadStart programs for over 15 years, currently providing consultation to 35 early learning centers. St. Vincent Family Services is uniquely experienced in collaborating with community partners to deliver quality social-emotional programming to an early childhood and at-risk population, to support **kindergarten readiness**.

As a result of our work in this space, 88% of children have improved in behavioral concerns. And 100% of early learning partners report satisfaction with the Early Childhood Mental Health services we provide. With this success, we have built a waiting list of over 20 early learning centers who would benefit from this crucial support. We have an established, trusted program and are able to serve more early learning centers – we just need additional funds to hire and train staff.

We are requesting an earmark of \$150,000 in each fiscal year from the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (ALI 830505) fund in H.B. 96.

Given the current budget constraints, we chose not to request additional GRF funding. Instead, we identified the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health line item—already funded at \$4 million per fiscal year to support providers like St. Vincent's. We are simply asking for a small, dedicated share of that funding to ensure we can continue our critical work in the community and support more children in achieving kindergarten readiness

St. Vincent Family Services has appreciated the partnership with the State of Ohio and the General Assembly in the last few years. Ohio has made great efforts to improve the health and safety of Ohio's children, and St. Vincent Family Services has had the opportunity to join in these efforts by continuing our care for children and families. We intend to keep showing up for young children in need in the way they need us most. In this case, expanding upon our 15-year Early Childhood Mental Health program to support early intervention and kindergarten readiness.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.