



Senate Health Committee  
May 13, 2025

### House Bill 96 Testimony: The Buckeye Ranch

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 96.

My name is Christina Massey, and I serve as the Executive Vice President of The Buckeye Ranch, a leading provider of child welfare and behavioral health services in Ohio and a member of the Ohio Children's Alliance.

For over 60 years, The Buckeye Ranch has served Ohio's most vulnerable children and families through a continuum of child welfare and mental health services. As a private provider of foster care since 1997, we place children navigating complex behavioral health needs in our therapeutic foster homes.

Ohio is one of **only nine states** with a **county-run child welfare system**, meaning each of Ohio's **88 counties** sets **its own policies, rates, and provider requirements**. While counties **hold legal custody** of children in foster care, they rely on **private agencies like The Buckeye Ranch** to train foster homes and place children.

In addition to this, some counties contract out other services to their private agency counterparts. In **Franklin County**, The Buckeye Ranch plays a unique role through the **Permanent Family Solutions Network (PFSN)**, where we **directly provide child protection casework and maintain custodial relationships** for **Franklin County Children Services (FCCS)**. This **public-private partnership** gives us perspective as both a private provider and a purchaser of care from other agencies.

The **state budget must sustain critical investments to prevent placement shortages, longer wait times, and additional strain on families** while ensuring **sound policy changes** that strengthen, rather than destabilize, Ohio's child welfare system.

**Our concerns & recommendations center around the Foster Care Rate Cards.** HB96 grants DCY authority to standardize foster care & residential placement rates, but fails to address the real cost drivers:

- Rate Pressure & System Strain
- Rising costs due to staffing, insurance, and regulatory compliance
- Regional cost variations and county by county complexity
- Shifting Population Needs
- Specialized residential programming based on the populations of youth served.



Ohio is in a placement crisis while rates are increasing due to agencies like ours absorbing costs of staffing due to shortages, high cost of liability insurance, and greater regulatory compliance. Today, The Buckeye Ranch's liability insurance doubled in cost year over year, exceeding a quarter of one million dollars annually.

Additionally, Ohio (OAC 5101:2-47-23) requires private providers to submit detailed cost reports annually which is the basis for placement rate contracting. Ohio required consistent inflationary rates post pandemic.

The Buckeye Ranch has 235 foster homes across Central Ohio and Southwest Ohio. Today, we contract with 41 different counties to utilize these homes. The cost of doing business varies by county due to county-imposed regulatory costs. One county requires us to conduct finger printing for every employee annually at \$50 per check, or \$10,000 annually.

Today, 1 in 4 youth who need placement have severe mental health needs, disabilities, or juvenile justice involvement. These youth require more supervision and specialized treatment plans for them. One rate does not account for these various needs.

This foster care rate card could exacerbate placement crisis. Ohio does not have a standardized level of care, or standardized expectations across counties. We would ask that this committee not consider widespread systemic changes without careful examination to the direct and indirect impacts and the thoughtful consideration of all stakeholders.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all rate card, we request the new statutory language be removed from the bill and instead replaced with a legislator-led study committee. (This would be achieved with **Amendment SC0716.**) to:

- **Review IV-E cost reports and analyze cost drivers**
- **Ensure provider rates are fair and sustainable**
- **Develop data-driven solutions that stabilize the system**
- **Identify improved and standardized contracting policies, which today create additional administrative burden and red tape**
- **Provide a report with recommendations to the state legislature**
- **Ensure that we maintain and continue to grow foster home capacity to meet the characteristics of youth requiring foster homes in our State.**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.