



## **Testimony of Ed Cohn, President and CEO**

*House Bill 64—June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64. My name is Ed Cohn and I am President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio. I am here on behalf of the Ohio statewide association of Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies. After 25 years in banking, the last 13 as a bank President, I retired from banking more than 10 years ago to commit 100% of my time to helping our youth.

In House Bill 59, the previous operating budget, the General Assembly added an amendment that provided funding for the Big Brothers Big Sisters AMACHI Ohio program. This program provides mentoring services for children of incarcerated parents. AMACHI is a Nigerian word which means, “Who knows but what God has brought us through this child.”

While this is an untracked demographic, it is estimated there are more than 56,000 kids in Ohio with at least one parent in jail. Studies have shown that these kids are twice as likely to engage in antisocial behavior and end up in prison themselves. Providing these kids with a mentor can help them cope with having an incarcerated parent and it can also ease the transition once that parent is released.

Independent national research conducted by top researchers in the field of mentoring proves that mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters positively impacts children’s lives. The Ohio children served by AMACHI are no exception. Using Big Brothers Big Sisters’ proven Program Outcome Evaluation, 80% of the youth served in the AMACHI program Ohio showed improvement on over half of the 21 development assets measured, with the following noteworthy results:

- 86% improved in their self-confidence
- 77% improved in their ability to make decisions
- 74% improved in their academic performance
- 74% improved in their relationship with other adults
- 72% improved in their sense of the future

One alumni AMACHI Little Brother from Butler County, Calvin, says, “having a Big Brother allowed me to believe it was okay to follow a different path than the one set before me by my circumstances. And one Alumni AMACHI Little Sister from Franklin County, Kanisha, says, “I am very grateful that I have a mentor to show me the way to where I want to go and what I need to do to get there.” Calvin and Kanisha are two of more than 4,000 Ohio children of incarcerated parents who have been mentored through AMACHI since the program began.

In House Bill 59, the previous state operating budget, the Senate added funding for AMACHI in the amount of \$1 million per fiscal year. These funds were appropriated from line item 600410, TANF State/Maintenance of Effort, which is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. This funding allowed more than 900 matches to be made statewide over the biennium.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio acts as the fiscal agent and clearinghouse for AMACHI funding. Matches are made across the state, and the funds are distributed to local Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies as those matches are made. This creates a very effective statewide program with no duplication of administrative costs so maximum funding goes to the kids and families we serve. We are very appreciative of your support for AMACHI and this very vulnerable population.

We are seeking an amendment to House Bill 64 to reauthorize these funds for another two years. This will result in 952 new matches over the biennium, funded for an average match length of 18 months. I want to be clear about that point – the matches that were made over the last two years will be sustained from separate funds and the funds from House Bill 64 will only be used for new matches.

In closing, I’d like to read you part of a letter that we received from a father imprisoned at Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell, Ohio.

*“My oldest two, Averie and Addison, are having a hard time with my absence,” he says, “and I think this is a perfect opportunity for them. They have been acting out and are starting to struggle at school. Please see if my babies fit the criteria for your mentorship program.”*

We are requesting funding because we are committed to serving this population through our AMACHI program. AMACHI not only allows us to keep youth like this prisoner’s children out of prison and on the right track, but it also avoids much greater costs down the road. Mentoring a child for one year costs less than \$2,000, while incarcerating a juvenile often exceeds \$202,000 annually. The positive outcomes that come from Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are dramatic and well documented through extensive research, and they bring great savings to the state in the long run.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today, for all of your support and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.