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June 25, 2019

To: Chairman Derek Merrin
Vice Chairman Don Manning
Ranking Member Janine Boyd
Members of the House Health Committee

From: Aaron Baer
President, Citizens for Community Values

Re: Support of SB 6 and the Safe Families Program

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the House Health committee:

My name is Aaron Baer and I am the president of Citizens for Community Values, Ohio's Family Policy Council. As a Christian organization, central to our mission is advocating for public policy that builds up families – especially families in crisis. We take very seriously the call in James 1:27 that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”

Though I am an Ohio native, prior to serving as the president of CCV, I served as the policy advisory to Arizona Attorney General, Mark Brnovich.

At the time Arizona, much like Ohio today, was facing a child welfare crisis. As you could imagine, being so close to the border, and dealing with a drug crisis of our own left a lot of broken families, and children seeking forever homes.

Finding a solution to the crisis was complex – and what became clear was that while the government plays an essential role in helping families and children work through these difficult situations, the government cannot fix the problem alone.

It takes communities, volunteer organizations, and especially churches to find solutions for the thousands of families in crisis.

What also stood out was that most of the solutions offered to the child welfare crisis were geared more towards treating symptoms, instead of the underlying circumstances. What I mean is that most of the solutions discussed revolve around once a child enters the state system through Job and Family services ***how to do we resolve that situation as quickly and compassionately as possible to bring stability to that child's life?***

That is an incredibly important question, yet it can leave policy makers in a position of constantly ***trying to play catch up.***

This is why I was so inspired by the work of Safe Families in Arizona, and why I was thrilled to see that this essential ministry exists and is thriving in Ohio today.



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The Safe Families model is exactly what is needed because it keeps children out of the state system in the first place when possible.

Today in Ohio there are more than 16,000 children in the foster care system, and only 7,200 licensed foster homes. Some estimate we could reach 18,000 foster children in the system by the end of the year.

The Safe Families model allows churches to step into situations where parents in their community may not be able to take care of their kids for a short period and are at risk of having the government intervene to provide for the well-being of the child. This experience is not only costly to the state, but also can be traumatizing for the child.

By providing short term care for children, and not requiring the courts and Job and Family Services to intervene Safe Families provides a win for everyone.

This is why Citizens for Community Values so strongly supports Senate Bill 6.

SB 6 lays out the guidelines by which programs like Safe Families can operate –it requires training for host families, and the accountability measures organizations like Safe Families must have in place to ensure children are being protected.

It also ensures Job and Family Services is still empowered to step in if necessary.

Our hope is that through SB 6, other churches will be inspired to pick up the mantle to help fight the child welfare crisis, and other organizations will look to see what they can do to help.

SB 6 also gives organizations like Safe Families the confidence to grow their presence in Ohio, to help more families and children.

Governor DeWine has issued the call multiple times for Ohioans – especially the faith community – to step up to the plate to help address the child welfare crisis. That's exactly what Safe Families is doing today, and SB 6 helps ensure that this program can not only endure, but expand.

Please support Ohio families in need, and vote yes on SB 6.

Thank you for your consideration, I'm happy to take any questions.

Citizens for Community Values (CCV) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that endeavors to create an Ohio where God's blessings of life, family, and religious freedom are treasured, respected, and protected.

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