



Ohio House Families, Aging & Human Services Committee
Representative Gayle Manning and Representative Tom Patton
House Bill 265 Sponsor Testimony
May 20, 2021

Chair Manchester, Vice-Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 265. Across Ohio, there is broad recognition that we are facing a foster care crisis. Our communities are struggling to find foster families and public children service agencies are often forced to look beyond their county and even state borders to find foster homes.

Children's crisis care facilities (CCFs), also known as crisis nurseries, provide temporary care to children ages 0-12 that are at risk for abuse or neglect due to family crises. They are a proven early intervention service that prevent child maltreatment, support healthy child development, strengthen and preserve families, and reduce foster care placements - which can save tens of millions of dollars in foster care costs across our state.

There are three crisis nurseries currently licensed by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services: Blessing House in Lorain and Providence House in Cleveland, which both provide support to children ages 0-12 that are at risk for abuse or neglect, and Brigid's Path in Dayton, a newborn recovery center for substance-exposed infants and their mothers.

We were approached by crisis nurseries in our districts in 2019 to introduce legislation with common-sense regulatory relief for these nurseries, while continuing to ensure the safety of children in their care. During the course of our work on then-House Bill 408, it quickly became clear that Ohio now has two distinct models of crisis nurseries and a new statute should be established to govern newborn recovery centers, defined in House Bill 265 as Residential Infant Care Centers (RICCs). We believe the legislation before you today is an improvement from House Bill 408, and in working closely with the three currently licensed crisis nurseries over the past three years, we are pleased to share that the bill has unanimous support from each of them.

Unlike traditional crisis nurseries, RICCs focus exclusively on care for newborn babies and mothers impacted by addiction. House Bill 265 creates a new statute specific to RICCs, which we worked on closely with Brigid's Path. Under this legislation, an entity currently licensed as a crisis nursery may apply for automatic licensure as a RICC. The bill requires ODJFS to promulgate rules for RICCs, however, to avoid any disruption of services, it permits RICCs to

continue operating based off the Administrative Code for crisis nurseries until new rules are promulgated.

In addition to the new code section created, the bill would ease regulatory burdens for crisis nurseries and RICCs by permitting volunteers and contracted transportation providers that have passed a background check and received training to transport children when needed. While in their care, crisis nurseries provide daily transportation to school, doctors' appointments, and other activities. Currently, childcare staff must provide the transportation due to staff/child ratio requirements. As each child may go to a different school, this can mean crisis nurseries have to waitlist children who require school transportation.

The bill also permits trained and screened administrative staff, interns and volunteers to count toward staff ratios in emergency situations. Due to mandated childcare staffing ratios, at times nurseries must prevent staff from leaving the facility even if they are ill or need to transport a child during an emergency to maintain these ratios. The bill also includes crisis nurseries and RICCs in the SORN residency restrictions already established for schools and day-care centers.

Finally, House Bill 265 creates a "Family Preservation Center" subcategory for crisis nurseries and RICCs that provide family preservation programs using evidence-informed practices for family case management, parent education, and trauma services with healing-centered interventions, which aligns with new Ohio QRTP guidelines aligned with the Family First Preservation Services Act passed by Congress in 2018.

This bill will allow crisis care facilities and residential infant care centers to continue to play a role in addressing Ohio's foster care crisis by increasing the number of children and families served and preserved in our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. We're happy to answer any questions you may have.