

**Mark Butler**

**Testimony to the House Finance Subcommittee Health and Human Services on H.B. 110**

March 4, 2021

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify on H.B. 110.

I would like to witness to a truth once again: forcing parents of children with disabilities and mental illnesses to relinquish custody of their children to get help is wrong! I am pleased and grateful that this was heard and acted upon in the 2020-2021 Biennial Budget.

Some of you may be familiar with my family's story. In 2014, my wife and I were forced to relinquish custody of our then 16-year-old son Andrew when his violent outburst and behavioral issues became too extreme to address in our family setting. In addition to Autism, Andrew also has a severe intellectual disability and several mental illnesses. He is also non-verbal.

Eventually Andrew's behavior reached the point where our family's safety was at risk. Social workers there told us that it was no longer safe to have him living in our home and that he needed out-of-home residential treatment.

Andrew's Medicaid Waiver would not assist with this and neither would our family's private insurance. We were told our only option was to surrender custody to our county children's services agency. Making that call to children's services is still the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life.

Andrew was sent to a facility two-hours from our family home. We visited him every weekend until we were finally allowed to bring him back to our community. I promised would do anything I could to prevent this from happening to anyone else.

In my previous testimony, I asked how forcing parents to relinquish custody of their children to get help was acceptable in Ohio? The answer I heard back from every Representative and Senator was a resounding: this is not acceptable! Over the past two years, Ohio has kept hundreds of families from enduring what my family had to endure.

This past year has been difficult for every Ohio family. Andrew and his sister Katie, who also has Autism, have experienced major setbacks. The behavioral issues that families of Multi-System Youth must face have only been exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We owe it to those families to continue the progress we made before the pandemic and to make strides toward permanently ending forced custody relinquishment in Ohio.

To accomplish this, I ask that you maintain the Multi-System Youth Child Relinquishment Fund as introduced, support funding dedicated for Multi-System Youth across state agencies, and support the funding necessary to successfully implement OhioRISE in the Ohio Department Medicaid budget.

Thank you.