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HB110 Testimony  
Senate Finance Committee

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Brittney Madison, I am the organizer for Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE). NOBLE is a coalition of organizations and individuals who bring the voices of low-income individuals and families to the State Biennium Budget process, which is why I am here today.

Kinship care is a crucial investment. Roughly 124,000 children in Ohio live with relatives or trusted family friends. Research shows that when a child is taken from their biological parent, they are better able to adjust to a new living environment and less likely to experience behavioral challenges at school when they are placed with extended family, grandparents, or close family friends, compared to foster care.

I am a product of kinship care, as I was raised by my grandparents, and can attest to the issues that kinship caregivers face daily. One major obstacle that kinship caregivers face is that the amount of lead time and training that they are given to prepare prior to assuming their new caregiving responsibilities is very different from that of non-kin foster parents, with many kinship caregivers having little to no time to prepare. Most kinship caregivers take on the responsibility in the midst of a crisis situation, often finding themselves with a child in their care within a few days of receiving a call out of the blue. This often puts the caregiver in a position where they are unprepared to meet the immediate needs of the child, such as clothing, beds, etc.

One program that is especially helpful in mediating the above-mentioned issue is the TANF funded Kinship Caregiver Program, which provides one-time stabilization expenses to caregivers.

I find it troubling that the budget as proposed has cut the TANF earmark for the Kinship Caregiver Program completely, from \$15 million annually in previous years. This cut could be disastrous for many kinship caregivers, whose numbers have only been increasing in recent years. Thus, I urge you to not only restore funding, but to expand the program to help kinship caregivers with short-term expenses.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today.