



**Proponent Testimony on Am. H.B. 265  
Senate Health Committee  
Natalie A. Leek, President & CEO**

**November 17, 2021**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for Amended House Bill 265.

On October 20, 2021, I provided proponent testimony before the Committee for Senate Bill 167. Today, I am pleased to once again submit proponent testimony for the Amended House Bill 265. With your support to pass the amended bill, Providence House will apply for the new Family Preservation Center sub licensure certification for facilities that have as their primary purpose the preservation of families through evidence-informed preteen foster care diversion practices and programs.

For 40 years, Providence House has worked to keep Ohio's kids safe and families together. We are licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and are a trusted community resource that has cared for and reunited over 13,000 children and families.

We work with parents who are struggling to meet their children's basic needs, require medical, mental health, or substance abuse treatment, are homeless, or fleeing domestic violence. 75% of the families we serve have history with child protective services and fear that they will lose custody of their children if they seek help. Providence House provides free, noncustodial shelter to children newborn to 12-years-old while partnering with parents to address family crises, strengthen parenting skills, and connect resources and services from human service partners to ensure families can stay together.

As mentioned in my previous testimony, Providence House has a proven record of success. Demand for our services and interest in our work as an alternative to foster care continues to grow. We are currently supporting champions in Toledo, Akron, and Columbus who hope to replicate our model and keep hundreds more children safe and families together.

Amended House Bill 265 contains necessary updates and clarifications for existing crisis nurseries that will also benefit any new nurseries that may open in Ohio. Like Senate Bill 167, the bill acknowledges the two distinct crisis nursery models in Ohio and creates a new statute to govern Residential Infant Care Centers that focus on care for infants affected by addiction. By better defining and regulating the types of crisis nurseries that now exist under the Children's Crisis Nursery and Residential Infant Care Center statutes, we can better support inquiries for new nurseries and align them to the types of licensing models they should operate within.

The Revised Code currently allows children to stay at a Children's Crisis Nursery for up to 60 days, or 90 if their parent is in-patient or incarcerated. Like Senate Bill 167, Amended House Bill

265 extends the length of stay for all children up to 90 days. We do not anticipate our average length of stay extending substantially with this change, but there are times when a parent may need a few more days or weeks to get back on their feet or secure safe housing prior to reuniting with their child and this provision will give them the flexibility needed.

The bill would also permit volunteers and interns who have passed background checks and received the same training as childcare staff to count toward staff ratios for up to three hours in the case of an emergency. Additionally, the bill would allow approved professional transportation services to provide school transportation to the children. This provision will allow us to support more school age children each year, as Providence House serves families in over 30 zip codes in Northeast Ohio.

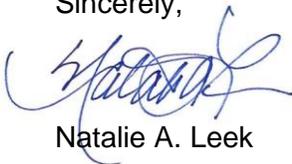
Amended House Bill 265, compared to Senate Bill 167, contains two clarifications regarding volunteers and emergency situations that Providence House supports. Amended House Bill 265:

- Removes “emergency situation” in Line 414 for staff ratio purposes to provide the crisis care facilities with appropriate discretion of what justifies volunteers use in ratio.
- Removes “volunteers” in Line 424 from the list of persons who can transport children to align current practice, which is dictated by insurance obligations of the providers, with the law.

I ask for your support of Amended House Bill 265. This bill will support the important work provided by Ohio’s Crisis Nurseries and Residential Infant Care Centers, while also providing greater ease of entry for new nurseries in Ohio that are working to keep kids safe and families together, safer, and stronger.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Natalie A. Leek', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Natalie A. Leek