



children's
defense fund
ohio



**Senate Judiciary Committee
HB 4 – Proponent Testimony
January 25, 2022**

Good afternoon, Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

My name is Juliana Barton, and I am a former foster youth originally from Northwest Ohio. Nearly every day, for over 17 years of my life, I suffered horrific and unthinkable abuse at the hands of my father. Though, my abuse did not go unnoticed. Despite numerous warning signs and calls made by others to the police and Child Protective Services, both law enforcement and the child welfare system failed to protect my safety and well-being. Everything I had been taught as a child about whom to trust and reach out to for help had proven to be wrong.

It would take a brutal assault that left me severely injured before I was finally removed from my father's care. The prolonged abuse I experienced significantly impacted my life, leading me to struggle for many years after I aged out of the foster care system. However, I eventually found healing and purpose by sharing my story to inspire change and help prevent others from enduring the same trauma I experienced as a child.

Three years ago—almost to this exact day—marks my first ever involvement in advocacy. Specifically, a meeting with Governor DeWine's then newly established Office of Children's Initiatives to propose a youth-dedicated Ombudsman office as an alternative mechanism for reporting abuse and neglect.

Since that day, I have had the amazing opportunity to lead and serve on numerous panels, presentations, and advocacy campaigns while acting as the governmental liaison for ACTION Ohio. I am also a member of Governor DeWine's Advisory Council on Children Services Transformation and the Ohio Department of Medicaid Ohio RISE Advisory Committee.

All of these experiences have brought me to this moment, where I am pleased to stand before you all in strong support of H.B. 4, as amended. The amended bill directly reflects the voices, concerns, and policy recommendations of Ohio's current and former foster youth.

I would also like to express gratitude to Representatives Manchester and Plummer for their time and efforts to include current and former foster youth voices in the decisions that affect our outcomes. Thank you, Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Contact: Juliana Barton, Governmental Liaison
ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)
juliana.barton@gmail.com
(614) 816-0027