**Proponent Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 125**

**Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee**

**Calvin L. Williams**

**Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families**

**September 26, 2017**

Good afternoon Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Committee:

My name is Calvin Williams. I am the President of Lucian Families Inc., a firm that provides training, coaching, and program development for father, mother and family serving programs and systems. I have over 20 years of experience managing comprehensive, direct service programs serving fathers, including the Lighthouse REAL Dads program and the SUMA Fatherhood Project. Both of those programs had long-term partnerships with the Hamilton County Child Support Agency. I am also a founding Board member of the Ohio Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, a fourteen-year old statewide training, advocacy and support organization for father and family practitioners.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of SB 125.

In my years serving fathers and families, I have sadly watched many able, willing, present and committed fathers bowed under by the burden of unrealistic, unreasonable child support orders that simply do not match their ability to pay. I support SB 125’s provision to update the Economic tables allowing for more realistic child support orders based on actual earnings and an obligor’s ability to pay. From my experience this will allow more parents, especially fathers, to stay current with their child support order and for the custodial household to receive more consistent and reliable support for the child.

When I served as Program Director for the Lighthouse REAL Dads program, we partnered with the Hamilton County Child support Enforcement Agency. This partnership included a child support technician operating full time from the fatherhood program facilities. Upon intake into the program, all fathers had their child support cases reassigned in the system to a specialized caseload, the REAL Dads caseload, serviced by the one child support technician stationed at the REAL Dads facility. Over a four-year period, the REAL Dads caseload vastly outperformed the child support system-wide caseloads, collecting over $400,000 from obligors described by the then county Child Support Director as “our most difficult to locate and get payments from.” This success was due largely to the REAL Dads child support technician closely working with each father to get their orders modified to amounts that were more aligned with their ability to pay. And it laid waste to the too commonly held presumption that low-income or poor men “don’t want to pay child support.” What’s more accurate is these men want to support their children like all parents, yet they desire to be able to afford housing, transportation, clothes, food and most importantly, to provide for their children when they have them in their care. That’s why I support the establishment of the Self Sufficiency Reserve and Parenting-Time Credit in SB 125.

Taken together, the updated Economic Tables, the Self Sufficiency Reserve and Parenting-Time Credit in SB 125 will support father’s desire to be with, parent and provide for their children. Those in opposition to this legislation will see these changes as a loss for poor custodial parents and their children. Yet poverty does not begin or end with child support payments. Poverty is a generational, systemic issue involving many decades of inequity, disenfranchisement and inequality in housing, tax, employment, education, labor and wealth distribution to name a few. Indiscriminately amplifying poverty on a child support obligor typically leads to increased conflict between the parents, and for the child, decreased access to and time with one parent, usually the father.

In my current role with the Talbert House Fatherhood Project in Cincinnati, Ohio, I provide co-parenting coaching services to fathers and mothers who are no longer in committed relationships. Over the past three years I’ve delivered over 1500 hours of co-parenting coaching sessions. This allows me an intimate look at how child support can affect relationships, with conflict over resources eroding chances of cooperative co-parenting. When parents are cooperating at even at a moderately healthy level, more resources are available to the child, above the amount of the child support payments. Most fathers know and are comfortable with the fact that they must provide more for their children than just child support. SB 125 supports their goals of parenting their children, meeting their support obligations and taking care of themselves.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and for your service to Ohio