Ohio House Health Committee

Representative Gayle Manning and Representative Tom Patton

House Bill 408 Sponsor Testimony

January 28, 2020

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 408. Across Ohio, there is broad recognition that we are facing a foster care crisis. Our communities are struggling to find foster families and public children service agencies are often forced to look beyond their county and even state borders to find foster homes.

Children’s crisis nurseries are a proven early intervention service that strengthen and preserve families, support healthy child development, and reduce foster care placements - which can save tens of millions of dollars in foster care costs across our state.

Crisis nurseries provide free temporary, non-custodial care to children newborn to 12 years old and work with parents to overcome family crises. There are three crisis nurseries currently licensed by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services: Providence House in Cleveland, Blessing House in Lorain, and Brigid’s Path in Dayton.

Given the significant increase in demand for these services, this bill is necessary to provide common-sense regulatory relief for crisis nurseries, while continuing to ensure the safety of children in their care. For example, due to mandated childcare staffing ratios, nurseries must often prevent staff from leaving the facility even if ill or to transport children in an emergency. House Bill 408 will allow for administrative staff, interns and volunteers that have received proper training and are under the childcare supervisors to count toward staff ratios for up to three hours in emergency situations, staff illness or inclement weather until backup childcare staff can arrive.

Transportation can also impact the ability to admit children in crisis nurseries. While in their care, nurseries provide daily transportation to school, doctors’ appointments, and other activities. Currently, childcare staff must provide the transportation due to the ratio requirements. As each child may go to a different school, this can mean nurseries have to limit the number of children in their care who require school transportation. For example, Providence House serves 31 zip codes in Northeast Ohio. Last year they had to waitlist 69 children because of transportation limitations. To address this issue, House Bill 408 would permit volunteers and contracted transportation providers that have passed a background check and received training to provide transportation for children when needed.

The bill also creates two new subcategory licensures in recognition of the fact that there are now two established crisis nursery models in the state. The first is the “Family Preservation Center” subcategory for a certified crisis nursery that provides family preservation programs using evidence-based practices for family case management, parent education and trauma screening and healing-centered interventions. The second is the “Residential infant care center” subcategory for a certified crisis nursery that has as its primary purpose services for infants born drug exposed. The new subcategories will allow each model to work with the Department of Job and Family Services on additional guidelines for advanced services for children and families in their care.

Additionally, the bill would:

* Increase the time that children can stay at a crisis nursery from 60 days to 90 days;
* Specify that placement of a child by a public child service agency at a crisis nursery will be entered as a respite or transitional stay under the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS), which is housed within JFS. This is important for local county children services departments that may not otherwise want to utilize services with a crisis nursery as the stays are often short and could have negative consequences with federal funding;
* Include crisis nurseries in the SORN residency restrictions already established for schools and day-care centers.

This bill will allow crisis nurseries to continue to play a role in addressing Ohio’s foster care crisis by increasing the number of children and families served in our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. We’re happy to answer any questions you may have.