



**Testimony on H.B. 33 Amendment HC 0265: Operating Budget for SFY 2024-2025  
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
March 8, 2023**

**Natalie A. Leek, President & CEO  
Providence House, Inc.  
Cuyahoga County**

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for House Bill 33 Amendment HC 0265.

Ohio's licensed Crisis Care Facilities (Crisis Nurseries), Providence House in Cuyahoga County and Blessing House in Lorain County, offer critical support to families to help keep children safe, resolve family crises to keep families together, and prevent foster care placement.

This is important to note because nearly 90% of the parents who seek services from Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries were system involved themselves and are striving to break this cycle for their own children. By helping them, and preventing foster care placements, Ohio's Crisis Care Facilities save tens of millions in dollars in foster care costs by preserving families. Last year alone, Providence House successfully reunited 99% of families using our services.

Crisis Care Facilities (Crisis Nurseries) provide free, non-custodial emergency children's shelter and direct care for up to 90 days for children newborn through 12 years old whose families (typically single moms) are experiencing crises such as homelessness, domestic violence, mental health crisis, or who live unsafe situations which put their children at risk for abuse or neglect. While staying with us children remain in their parent's custody, as we focus on crisis intervention and family preservation services for the parent to stabilize and reunite the family.

Demand for our Family Preservation Crisis Nursery services continues to outpace our ability to serve families in need. Last year, 486 children were on our waiting list or went completely unserved due to lack of space at Providence House. Blessing House also has growing waiting lists for their services.

Beyond Providence House and Blessing House, I have spoken with leaders and organizations in Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Summit Counties who have expressed a significant need for a Family Preservation Crisis Nursery in their community and hope to replicate our model.

Ohio's licensed Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries, Providence House and Blessing House, are grateful to have received state support in previous budget cycles. Three licensed children's crisis care facilities were allocated a shared \$1 million per year budget line item in the last biennium that was appropriated based on the number of licensed beds at each facility. However, there have been significant changes at these organizations over the last two years that warrant review and revision of the current budget amendment for crisis care facilities.

Since the last budget, two of Ohio's licensed crisis care facilities have increased their combined bed capacity from a total of 40 beds to 70 beds – a 43% increase in children's crisis care beds. The third

facility is now licensed under a new statute, defined in HB 265 as a Residential Infant Care Center (RICC). This facility no longer operates under the licensing regulations of crisis care facilities.

As the current budget amendment is written, only \$879,000 is proposed to support licensed children's crisis care facilities – a 12% reduction from the last biennium budget – yet we have nearly doubled our collective service capacity.

Further, of this reduced amount, \$260,000 is allocated to the newly licensed RICC program, which is not licensed as a crisis care facility. If granted, this represents a 38% decrease in funding for licensed Crisis Care Facilities from that last biennium.

This devastating reduction will not only hamper efforts to expand our service levels, but will reduce capacity we are already struggling to maintain. With the 43% increase in the number of Crisis Nursery beds in the state coming online in 2023, coupled with the caregiver crisis in Ohio and increasing demand for competitive wages and benefits, the math in this current budget bill simply does add up for Ohio's families seeking to keep their kids safe and their families together.

State funding is essential to our work and continued success with the families we serve. And so, on behalf of our families and children, I respectfully request that you include \$1.25 million in the first year and \$1.5 million in the second year of the biennium to support Ohio's licensed Family Preservation Crisis Care Facilities; currently Providence House and Blessing House.

Increased funding from the State of Ohio would:

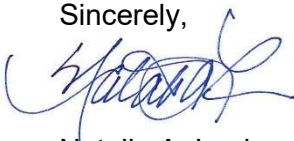
- Support the 43% increase in number of children's beds at Ohio's Crisis Nurseries.
- Ensure that Crisis Nurseries have the critical resources to attract, hire, and retain qualified, dedicated caregiving staff to deliver our services.
- Pave the way for new Crisis Nurseries to open in communities where they are needed throughout Ohio.

Since our founding in 1981, Providence House has worked to keep over 14,000 Ohio children safe and their families together. We are licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as a children's crisis care facility and certified qualified residential treatment program (QRTP). We are CARF accredited, an OMHAS and Medicaid certified behavioral health provider, and recognized as a trusted community resource and an awarded national leader in child abuse prevention, family preservation, and proactive alternative to foster care.

Please consider your investment in Ohio's Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries over the next biennium and demonstrate your commitment to the state's agenda for children, youth, and families by supporting innovative programs like Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries that help at-risk families experiencing crises and keep Ohio's children safe and families together.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration of my request to support the vital work done at Ohio's Family Preservation Crisis Nurseries.

Sincerely,



Natalie A. Leek  
President and CEO