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CarePortal

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Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, and Members of the House Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Olyvia Frederick, and I am the Ohio Area Director for CarePortal.

My husband and I have had the great honor of raising all three of our now adult daughters in Ohio public schools. We were not people of much means; in fact, we lived barely above the poverty level for much of their young lives, but we had a “village” who surrounded us to make sure our girls had everything they needed; from school supplies and school fees to coats and boots for the cold winter months in Northeast Ohio. They never went without, not because of how hard my husband and I worked, but because of our village: extended family, neighbors, and our local church.

Some twenty years later, too many families with school age children are struggling just to keep a roof over their children’s heads much less a good warm coat to protect from the harsh winters. Families have become isolated, and the proverbial “village” seems to be non-existent. We know this because the statistics for our state are staggering.

Over 16,000 children are in the foster care system in the great Buckeye State. 16,000!

Desmond Tutu said, “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the **river**. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.” The “river” is the overwhelmed foster care system that is not producing the best outcomes for our children.

Why have over 16,000 children fallen into the river? A large contributor is poverty. Did you know 75% of children are in foster care because of neglect, which is often unintentional resulting from poverty, isolation, and lack of community resources? Poverty in childhood is associated with lower school achievement; worse cognitive, behavioral, and attention-related outcomes; higher rates of delinquency, depressive and anxiety disorders; and higher rates of almost every psychiatric disorder in adulthood.

CarePortal a simple care-sharing network was created to address this lack of community and the poverty which so easily isolates families. **As you may recall, CarePortal is connecting technology that drives action for local children and families in crisis.** School professionals are often the first to see problems at home manifest themselves at school in the form of classroom behaviors, poor attendance, and dropping academic performance.

The school professional enters the need in CarePortal and CarePortal shares these needs with local trained churches, organizations, and individuals giving them a real-time opportunity to respond and care for children in their own communities at no cost or obligation to the families being served.

Let me be clear—this is in no way adding to the plates of our teachers, counselors, or administrators. We are not asking them to do additional screening or non-academic related activities. Our goal is to identify kids in need early on, before poverty related neglect occurs, and be the connector to the churches who want to help! The beauty of this program is in its simplicity—a teacher notices a student in need, with the permission of the family, they connect that family to local churches by activating CarePortal. The churches take it from there.

Our goal in the last two years has been to end the cycle of family breakdown by encouraging local churches trained in understanding boundaries, poverty, and trauma to come alongside local public schools in a collaborative effort to care for children and families in crisis. Thanks to funding from the state, CarePortal expanded where the need was greatest, our major metros. This included a particular emphasis on communities of color most impacted by racial disproportionality. I am honored to share that we have been able to see that initial goal realized as CarePortal is now in every major metro area in the great Buckeye State as well as 20 other counties throughout the state with 186 schools enrolled! This collaboration has included many different faiths who know building relationships within the community can and will create best outcomes for our children.

I am here to tell you today- this partnership is working!

To date, **over 3000 children in the public school system have been served!** School professionals entered needs for lice kits, shoes, coats, financial assistance for rent and utilities and beds, and home repairs, for over 1600 children to help improve their student's safety and wellbeing. School counselors, nurses, and teachers also asked us to help with removing educational barriers and improving school attendance for over 1400 children. The church and community partners worked together to provide everything from alarm clocks, calculators, car repairs, laundry items, and even dentures for a 16-year-old boy.

These examples reiterate what a teacher from Martin Luther King Elementary School said, "*Care Portal can help fill needs that otherwise could not be met. Meeting basic needs of our students plays a large role in keeping them on track academically*".

A truancy officer in Champaign County has championed CarePortal telling each school district that CarePortal is what every school should have. Every school district in Champaign County is now enrolled. Will you be a champion for our children and join us in this upstream movement to strengthen and empower families, reduce instances of unintentional neglect, and in turn, safely lower the number of children entering foster care by **approving our request of \$1.5 million per year in operating budget appropriations through the Ohio Department of Education to expand to 200 more schools over the next two years?**

Included with my submitted testimony are several stories from partnering schools as well as a map demonstrating where Care Portal is currently operating and where we would like to expand should we receive this funding.

Thank you so much for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Feedback from Partnering Schools

Cincinnati Public Schools:

When our local Resources Director started to use CarePortal, the first family that came to her mind were the Jetters. Ms. Jetters needed a car repair in order to get to work and provide for her family. A request was submitted to help with that need. The church in her neighborhood was notified through the system and they responded with volunteers that could look at the car. When repairs turned out to be far more expensive than they expected the church rallied around that family to keep them afloat even as Ms. Jetters lost the job she was trying so desperately to keep. In the weeks to come the local church helped Ms. Jetters find employment within walking distance of her home and the kids school so that she could remain in her supportive community. Since then, little things like meals and invitations to play dates were extended. Ms. Jetters has been able to call herself a part of the church around the corner from her home, and now has deep connections with a long term system of support.

Lancaster Local Schools:

Request 1: As Family and Student Support Coordinators for Lancaster City Schools, we are very resourceful professionals. However, in the past I have often felt stuck when a family comes to me with a basic need not being met. I would explore all possible resources in our community and often come up short as the family would not qualify, the whole basic need would not be met, or there might not be a resource for what they need. Care Portal was introduced to our District approximately 2 years ago and the impact on our families is undeniable, and the fact that it is free to our District has been very helpful. At the beginning of this school year, I had a homeless family with 3 young children that was staying in a motel and could not afford another night before they would be sleeping on the street. I submitted the request for financial support to pay for the motel for the family, CarePortal fulfilled the request for 1 week stay for the family and went beyond the request to provide the family with a 2nd week at the motel. This provided the mother with the finances and time to be able to move out of the motel into an apartment and find employment as well. I guarantee this would not have been possible without the support of CarePortal and the free access to this remarkable resource for our School District.

Request 2: I have been working with the family since fall of 2022 to problem solve a way of maintaining safe and secure outdoor play. The family owns their own home on a busy street and never played outside due to safety concerns as both boys have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. With my own observation here at school, I agreed, one person could not safely take them outdoors. Their mother struggled to transition them from the car to the door without being nervous they would dart towards the road. Their parents had already taken precautions inside the home to keep them from accessing doors and locks and eloping to the outside.

As we all know, being outdoors would help with many developmental skills such as reducing stress and anxiety (of both parent and children), improving awareness and reasoning and helping with gross motor skills. As we all are aware children with ASD commonly wander from caregivers and are at risk

for elopement. This can be traumatic for children and their caregivers. When referring to research, the first [study](#) to quantify the scope of the problem was published in *Pediatrics* in 2012. “Of the 1,218 children with ASD who were studied, almost half of those children had wandered off from home, school, or another safe place at least once after age 4. Many were missing long enough to cause concern, were in danger of drowning, or were at risk of being hurt by traffic”. As I began to research different ways to help support this family, I learned that they had been quoted several thousand dollars for a fence to be installed. I made many phone calls to community agencies and those I reached out to also made contacts to search for alternatives and ways to fund this project. All possibilities were exhausted. It all came down to CarePortal. CarePortal was able to connect me to a church that was willing to provide outreach and not only price materials and take measurements, but they also called the city for permits and are currently in the process of installing the fence. This was the majority of the cost and would not have happened had we not had this amazing collaboration and partnership with CarePortal. We have made a lasting impact on this family and I believe we have developed new friendships as well.

Pickerington Local Schools:

Request 1: CarePortal has shown up time and again to support our students and families when they felt like they had nowhere else to go. Partnering with CarePortal has allowed us to provide relief and hope to the people in my building that need it the most. This year alone, CarePortal has helped one of the families in my school establish safe, stable housing after six years of homelessness. Through the support of their network of local churches, another family received emergency rent and utility support during the coldest months of winter when emergency medical bills required all of their income. The real-world impact of this support is incredibly tangible for our families. It also allows our students to show up to school and focus on being a kid, a learner, and a friend, rather than wonder how they are going to make it through the next day. When families are able to take the incredibly brave and vulnerable step to ask for help, CarePortal's free support lets them know they are not alone. We could not support our families in these ways without our partnership with CarePortal. It is a comfort to our staff and our families knowing that CarePortal exists to fill these gaps and support our entire community. Thanks for all of your help and support this year!

Request 2: A school social worker became aware of a child who was living with her maternal grandparents in a rural community. The grandparents had full custody but a very limited income and had been without a working vehicle for months. The lack of a working vehicle was creating multiple challenges as the pre-teen had accidentally missed the bus one day and so missed a full day of school and a few weeks later became ill while at school and her grandparents couldn't pick her up. The young girl desired to be part of an after-school club and wasn't able to interact with kids her age outside of school due to the vehicle limitation. Within a few days, several community members from a local church responded to pay for the full cost of repairs, ensuring the family would have a working vehicle, ensuring the child can attend school and participate in extracurricular activities. Afterwards, the social worker commented, **“This family now has a working vehicle because of the kindness of a local family who towed the vehicle at no charge, a repair shop that performed a free estimate, and a church member who paid for the repairs.”**

Springfield City Schools:

Let me tell you a story about how CarePortal made a difference for a family that I worked with. This was a new family to the district and if it had not been for our counselors establishing this relationship with the family and making the determination that the family had needs beyond what the school could do, they would be living in an empty apartment with no beds, clothes, or food. CarePortal gave my counselor the opportunity to do outreach for the family and get services beyond what a school can assist with. I saw the request come across my desk but I also saw the alert come across my phone from my church in another city that we had a request from a family that needed support. The text message went around asking for connections to furniture, clothing and household items. This request was received by many churches in a matter of minutes! Our church was having a rummage sale so we invited the family to come before we opened to the public and let them look around and take whatever they needed to help them get in a better spot. No questions asked, just shop. They picked out dishes and pans and some clothing as well as one little easter decoration since they had lost all of theirs. Within hours, another church pledged support to get a bed for that family and yet another offered to help with food. It would have taken hours if not days to get support so instantaneously for this family. Within a week, CarePortal not only touched the lives of this mother and her daughter but HUNDREDS of others who received the text request for help and who stood to make a difference for a family they didn't even know. This program has been a blessing to our families in the district and to our church. Without this service, the buildings will return to having limited ability to assist families due to time constraints and money. We need CarePortal!

Activity in Ohio

In Ohio, a Care Network of **85** child-serving agencies, **9** Implementing Partners, **200+** local churches, and **2,000+** community responders have met **2,500+** requests, served **7,500+** vulnerable children and their families, and generated more than **\$2M** in economic impact across 26 counties since 2015.



Year	Counties Activated
2019 and prior	Fairfield (2015), Hamilton (2016), Montgomery (2018)
2020	Warren
2021	Ashland, Butler, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Knox, Lake, Summit
2022	Ashtabula, Champaign, Clark, Clermont, Columbiana, Delaware, Greene, Mahoning, Perry, Richland, Stark, Wood
2023 YTD	Geauga, Lucas, Madison
2023 Expansion	Auglaize, Athens, Allen, Belmont, Carroll, Defiance, Licking, Logan, Paulding, Pickaway, Union, Washington
2024 Expansion	Erie, Gallia, Hancock, Hardin, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Miami, Morgan, Pike, Portage, Ross, Scioto, Vinton