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Committees

Ways & Means, *Chair*
Education
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Chair S. Huffman, vice chair Johnson, and ranking member Antonio, thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 108. This legislation seeks to establish and regulate scholars residential centers. This bill is based around an existing entity, Boys Hope Girls Hope, that has residential scholars programs in Cincinnati and Cleveland. Currently, this entity is classified as a Qualified Residential Treatment Program by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The problem is that the classification as a residential treatment program has major disconnects to what the entity actually is, which is a scholars residential center.

Being under this classification is costly to scholars residential centers because they are forced to meet residential treatment program requirements that they otherwise would not have to meet. For example, scholars residential centers do not offer medical treatment or guardianship like treatment facilities do, but rather, they offer an opt-in residential program that provides long-term homes, holistic care, and college preparatory education to young men and women age 12-18.

Under this legislation, a definition and classification for scholars residential centers would be established. A scholars residential center is defined in the bill as a center that:

- Is a certified affiliate of a national organization with a mission to help underserved children in middle and high school in an academically focused and service-oriented manner;
- Is private and not-for-profit;
- Does not receive Title IV-E funding or child welfare associated funds;
- Only accepts children placed by their parents or legal custodian; and
- Is voluntary and uses a competitive selection process.

This bill would require the Director of Job and Family Services to adopt rules implementing center standards that are similar to rules for children's residential centers, group homes, and residential parenting facilities. However, the rules would differ in that a center is not subject to existing rules regarding:

- Treatment-focused requirements for residential agencies;
- Qualified residential treatment program requirements;
- Visiting and communications policies, provided that the center ensures family-child contact; and
- Recreation and leisure activity requirements, provided an available recreation area.

I would like to note that Job and Family Services and Boys Hope Girls Hope, the existing scholars residential center, have both agreed to the language and rules in this bill. By providing new rules that are specific to scholars residential centers, they would not have to meet unnecessary residential treatment program regulations that are costing them around \$100,000 per year to comply with. This would instead allow centers to use that money towards the children in the residential programs that offer safe, nurturing environments and support needed for children to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 108. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.