



Ohio Sunset Review Committee

Testimony on behalf of Ohio Family and Children First

Good afternoon, Chair Wilkin, Vice-Chair Hillyer, and members of the committee. My name is Bryan Stout with the Department of Children and Youth, and joining me today are Elisha Cangelosi and Colleen Tucker with Ohio Family and Children First at the Ohio Department of Children and Youth. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth serves as the administrative agent for Ohio Family and Children First.

Ohio Family and Children First started as an initiative of the Office of the Governor in 1991, before being codified in 1993, along with the 88 local family and children first councils. Ohio Family and Children First was created in statute (ORC 121.37) with the specific purpose of helping families seeking government services by streamlining and coordinating existing services for families seeking assistance for their children.

The Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet is comprised of the following state-level leadership: the directors of Education and Workforce, Department of Medicaid, Department of Youth Services, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Ohio Department of Health, Department of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Aging, Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Department of Children and Youth, Office of Budget and Management, the executive director of the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities agency.

These entities oversee and fund the work of the Ohio Family and Children First state office, comprised of seven state staff, who then monitor and oversee the work of the 88 local family and children first councils. Locally, the commissioners establish the 88 county Family and Children First Councils (FCFCs) comprised of mandated membership to include the following representatives or designees from:

- The local mental health board and health district;
- The county job and family services agency;
- County public children services agency;
- Developmental disabilities board;
- Community school districts;
- Local municipal corporations;
- The board of county commissioners;
- Early intervention collaborative;



- The Department of Youth Services;
- A head start program representative;
- Juvenile courts;
- Caregivers who have received services from the local council; and
- Non-profit agencies and other local members as identified by the commissioners.

Funding for Ohio Family and Children First comes through contributions from the Ohio Family and Children First cabinet agencies in the form of two Interagency Agreements. The first interagency agreement in the amount of \$1,210,941 for SFY24, and \$1,518,173 for SFY25, is funded by 11 of the 12 cabinet agencies (the Ohio Office of Budget and Management does not financially contribute, but is a member of cabinet) to support the operations of the state office. The second interagency agreement in the amount of \$4,350,529 for SFY24 and SFY25 is funded by 4 of the cabinet agencies (the Ohio Departments of Youth Services, Job and Family Services, Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health and Addiction Services) which allows Ohio Family and Children First to provide an allocation to each of the 88 local family and children first councils to provide Family Centered Supports and Services to children and families in their local communities who need non-clinical services and supports, along with critical service coordination. In addition to these agreements, Ohio Family and Children First and the 88 local family and children first councils receive funding through the following budget appropriations:

- Operational Capacity Building Funds: \$2,706,000 total GRF in SFY24 and SFY25 to support the operations of the 88 local family and children first councils (\$30,750/per county/per SFY);
- Multi-System Youth Administrative Fund: \$316,800 in MSY/GRF allocation for SFY24 and SFY25 to support the completion of MSY applications by local family and children first councils (\$3,600/per county/SFY); and
- Multi-System Youth Training and Best Practice Funds: \$2,000,000 MSY/GRF allocation to support activities and programs designed to assist the state office and the local family and children first councils in using best practices to support multi-system youth and families.

Despite a very modest budget, Ohio Family and Children First's vision is for every child and family to thrive and succeed within healthy communities, and all work at the state and local level is directed towards that aim. As Ohio Family and Children First is a partnership of state and local government, communities, and families, family and children first councils are in a unique position to enhance child and family well-being by building community capacity for needed relationships and services, coordinate systems and services that would typically be siloed, and to truly engage families by utilizing wraparound and wraparound-grounded service coordination



principles. These efforts contribute to youth being successfully maintained in their homes and communities instead of ending up in out-of-home placements.

For the past 5 years, our data has shown that over 91% of youth served by family and children first councils have been consistently maintained in their communities. As we work to identify earlier the children, youth, and their families in Ohio who face acute and increasingly complex needs, the work of Ohio Family and Children First and the 88 local family and children first councils has never been more critical to ensure that families who require the system of care expertise that family and children first councils bring to bear can access those needed supports in our local communities.

Therefore, we recommend the continuation of Ohio Family and Children First. It has a long-standing place in our state and local communities, is conducting relevant current activities, is low cost to the state in comparison to larger programs, and it is of critical importance to not only the overall success of our state, but to the thousands of families who depend on the ability to contact their local family and children first council to help them navigate our state and local systems to obtain needed help for their children.

Thank you, Chair Wilkin. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.