



**children's
defense fund
ohio**

**House Finance Committee
HB 110 - Proponent Testimony
3/11/2021
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Chairperson Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 110. I am here today to offer support for HB 110's budget provisions in support of whole child wellbeing.

Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy behind us, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to appropriate and targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. We recognize that every child contributes to the vibrancy and success of our communities and are therefore driven to ensure every child and young person has equitable opportunities to gain the social, economic, cultural and political capital they need to flourish into adulthood and give back to their communities.

As a member of the Ohio Children's Budget Coalition, a coalition of 23 statewide advocacy organizations committed to creating a vision of child wellbeing in Ohio, we understand that children do not come in pieces, and neither should our policy and budget decisions when it comes to their overall wellbeing. We are committed to advocating for the prioritization of the whole child in the FY22-23 Ohio budget, which includes ensuring adequate investments in the systems they rely on and the communities they call home. Further, we recognize that our state's budget solutions must prioritize racial equity and combat the effects of structural racism in our communities, which negatively impact child outcomes.

The budget is a moral document that is a reflection of our priorities as a state, and we must do right by our youngest Ohioans – the future of Ohio. We must ensure our budget invests in and protects essential programs our children need to recover from this traumatic year, live in dignity, and thrive.

We applaud the Governor's executive budget inclusions that support whole child wellbeing, such as: increasing investments in Student Wellness and Success Funding to school districts by \$100 million per fiscal year to meet increased child mental and behavioral health needs; prioritizing broadband internet access and availability – which has emerged as a superdeterminant of health and crucial lever of equity amid the pandemic – by investing in its



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expansion and infrastructure; and also for key provisions in child welfare, including the adoption of a foster youth Bill of Rights with a funded foster youth

ombuds office that has the funding and authority to enforce it. These are critical investments in whole child wellbeing – especially for our most vulnerable – that must be protected throughout the budget.

As an organization, we also recommend and want to raise the following issues for continued deliberations on HB 110:

- **Ensure Student Wellness and Success Funds target child mental and behavioral health needs.** While flexibility is important to this provision so that schools can cater to the unique needs of their students, we must protect this funding to ensure it its being used for its intended purpose. With the ultimate goal of ensuring children have a medical home in their communities, and that their access to health care is continuous and not disrupted by school closures, breaks or hours, we recommend language be included guiding implementation of these dollars to prioritizing community partnerships. Further, mental and behavioral needs are significant among children – especially right now – and we must leverage our community partnerships to address these immediate needs and ongoing issues by actively assessing student needs in mental and behavioral health through partnerships with local ADAMH's boards.
- **Address infant and maternal wellbeing through greater access to health care and essential services.** Language to extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum for all eligible women must be included in the budget. All mothers need adequate access to care before, during and after pregnancy – we can do this by immediately submitting an 1115 demonstration waiver to extend 12 months continuous coverage postpartum to all Medicaid eligible women, not just those with substance use disorders (SUD), and also by changing the State Plan Amendment to extend coverage to 12 months postpartum, taking opportunity presented by federally passed legislation to make this more permanent and avoid reapplication requirements for the waiver. Further, doubling our investments in evidence-based home visiting is also critical to laying healthy foundations for Ohio children and their families.
- **Provide funding and language for specific provisions in child welfare.** We recommend that there be a specific funding for an ombuds office (not currently included in HB 110, but mentioned in the Governor's Blue Book), and we also recommend that language be included that ensures the foster youth bill of rights is informed by and designed by current and former foster youth so that it is informed by youth voice and aligned with their needs.

We urge you to prioritize whole child wellbeing as the budget process continues, for the future of our children and the future of Ohio. I appreciate having the opportunity to provide testimony today. Thank you.