

January 21, 2019

Dear State Leaders,

Ohio has a strong and historic alliance of 74 community agencies that empower atrisk children and their families to reach their potential, every day. These agencies comprise the **Ohio Children's Alliance**, the oldest statewide child advocacy organization in Ohio.

Our Alliance collaborated to produce budget and policy solutions for your consideration as you develop the SFY 20-21 government operating budget. Our proposals are actionable and in alignment with recent progress made in our state through the leadership of the Legislature and our new Governor Mike DeWine. The solutions address three goals:

- 1. Empower communities to respond to the opiate crisis
- 2. Preserve families and prevent children from entering foster care
- 3. Re-authorization of Bridges

The time is now to invest in what works and to embrace new strategies to address our state's complex and costly problems. We ask that you review our ideas and to call on us to help you implement these and other important policy changes.

Sincerely,

Mark Mecum
Chief Executive Officer

Matt Kresic Board Chair

Who We Are

The Ohio Children's Alliance (formerly the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies) was founded as Ohio's first statewide child advocacy organization in 1973. Over the past four decades, we have grown to become a vital resource and voice for Ohio's community agencies who serve vulnerable children and families impacted by trauma, toxic stress, and addiction. We support the agencies, policy makers, and the entire sector through advocacy, education, and innovation.

Member Agencies

Our 74 member agencies, located in communities across Ohio, serve over 140,000 clients each year. They employ over 10,000 members of Ohio's workforce and are on the front lines of addressing our state's most pressing community problems. Their services include: behavioral health, foster care and adoption, group homes and residential treatment, pediatric care, and inpatient psychiatric hospitals.



Advocate

We focus our attention on the child welfare and behavioral health sectors, which ultimately drive most of the regulations, funding, and initiatives that impact our member community agencies. We collaborate closely with the Ohio General Assembly, Governor's administration and cabinet agencies in this regard.



Educate

The Alliance advances the field of child welfare and behavioral health through trainings, conferences, and various learning communities and practice improvement seminars. Each year, we feature nationally recognized speakers and researchers to showcase new ideas and emerging technology to support Ohio agencies to stay on the cutting edge of their industry.



Innovate & Connect

The Alliance believes in the power of collaboration, and through this spirit, created a social enterprise to foster innovation and collaboration among community agencies. The enterprise, the *Child and Family Health Collaborative of Ohio*, is currently managing two large projects: the *Bridges* extended foster care grant from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and a health care quality incentive contract with UnitedHealthcare that rewards providers for achieving improved health outcomes for children.



educate advocate innovate connect

Empower Communities to Respond to the Opiate Crisis

We recognize and appreciate the substantial investment the State of Ohio has made to address the opiate crisis over the last decade. We offer the following five recommendations to build upon recent progress and to address the crisis from other angles.

- 1. Expand access to treatment by maintaining Medicaid expansion. Maintaining access to Medicaid coverage for hundreds of thousands of working-age Ohioans, which includes thousands of working parents and young adults, is a critical strategy to prevent addiction, treat addiction, and ultimately to promote a healthy workforce in our state.
- 2. Establish an independent behavioral health parity unit in state government. We recommend the Legislature charge a state department or entity with management and enforcement power over our state's compliance with state and federal behavioral health care parity laws, which today are largely going un-enforced.
- 3. Build the treatment workforce. The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) previously made an investment to establish fellowships, loan repayment, and tuition reimbursement for individuals employed in the behavioral health sector. This support boosted our workforce to meet growing demands in communities. We recommend the Legislature appropriate another round of funding to OhioMHAS (\$6 million, SFY 20, OhioMHAS) to continue this investment in the workforce. We also recommend appropriation of funds to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) (\$6 million, SFY 20, ODJFS) to launch an identical program for the workforce among child welfare agencies, who are also on the front lines and face similar workforce challenges.
- 4. Establish grants to spur innovation in community behavioral health. With implementation of the behavioral health Re-Design and integration into Medicaid managed care, local behavioral health providers are facing unprecedented challenges. We recommend the Legislature make available competitive innovation funds for these organizations to access to support their efforts to meet new administrative and technological demands (\$8 million, SFY 20; \$8 million, SFY 21, OhioMHAS).
- 5. Recruit more foster caregivers to care for children in crisis. Ohio is not keeping pace with the amount of foster homes to care for the record number of children entering child protective services custody. Due to the shortage, children are being placed in foster care settings far away even in other states leading to increased cost and worsened family outcomes. We recommend the Legislature appropriate funds to ODJFS to release a competitive grant to catalyze local foster home recruitment campaigns (\$2 million, SFY 20, ODJFS).

Preserve Families and Prevent Children from Entering Foster Care

During 2018, the U.S. Congress enacted sweeping reforms to the hundreds of millions of child welfare funding available to Ohio. The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) creates new restrictions and opportunities for how Ohio can access the federal funding. We must ensure our child welfare sector is ready to adjust to these financial and regulatory changes, otherwise it could produce a net loss in funding available to support foster children and families in need.

- 1. Establish a Center of Excellence to promote readiness of FFPSA implementation. A state-supported center would provide the training and technical assistance that Ohio's 200 local child welfare agencies need to ensure successful FFPSA implementation. We recommend an appropriation to ODJFS to competitively procure a vendor to start-up and manage this center (\$6 million, SFY 20; \$3 million, SFY 21, ODJFS).
- 2. Preserve families by fixing the budget allocation for the Multi-System Youth Fund. We commend the Legislature for establishing the Joint Committee on Multi-System Youth. The Legislature acted on many of its recommendations, including a \$5 million/year allocation to support families in crisis. Unfortunately, the funds went largely unspent due to restrictions imposed by the source of funding (TANF). We recommend the Legislature fund the program with General Revenue Fund dollars instead so that families can access services designed to prevent custody relinquishment (\$5 million, SFY 20, \$5 million, SFY 21, OhioMHAS).
- 3. Seek Medicaid waiver to expand Wrapround services for children with intensive needs. Wraparound programs are a proven, cost-effective model that improves the lives of children and families with complex needs. This team-based planning process requires service coordination and funds to support families' service needs activities that Medicaid could pay for with a generous federal match. Our state system is poised to benefit from the Department of Medicaid submitting a Medicaid waiver request (not later than the end of SFY 21) to CMS to permit Ohio to leverage Medicaid funds to implement Wraparound statewide, thereby ensuring access to thousands of children and families in need.
- 4. **Provide sufficient resources for child protective services**. Over the past decade, our county child protective service agencies have coped with major funding cuts, despite the growing demand for services, largely caused by the opiate crisis. Public children services agencies have reached a "tipping point" and poor family outcomes are being reported. It is critical for the State of Ohio to prioritize funding to protect children in our government's custody.
- 5. **Establish a Referral Navigator Program.** We proposed ODJFS establish a grant for a Referral Navigator Program. The program would provide children service agencies with experts who will assist them in making cost-effective and appropriate foster care placements and treatment arrangement for children with complex needs. This idea is supported by many system stakeholders and state department officials. (\$500K, SFY 20, \$500K, SFY 21, ODJFS).

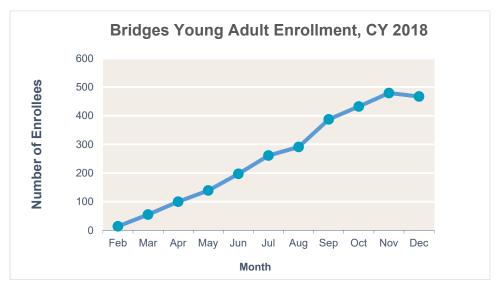
Re-Authorization of *Bridges*

Following passage of Ohio House Bill 50 of the 132nd General Assembly, the Bridges program was established by ODJFS to support the nearly 1,000 young adults who "age out" of foster care each year. Historically, these young adults struggled to achieve success in adulthood. They faced high rates of homelessness, unemployment, and unplanned pregnancies. The goal of Ohio House Bill 50 was to change those outcomes through specialized housing and case management services.

Beginning on February 1, 2018, the new Bridges program started and began delivering support to young adults who age out of foster care. Services are provided consistently and statewide through a grant with the Child and Family Health Collaborative of Ohio. During the program's first year of operation, Bridges has served approximately 500 young adults!

The program has steady enrollment growth (as shown in the chart below) and is well on its way to reaching all eligible foster care alumni who would benefit from the program's support services.

Re-authorization of the Bridges program would enable our state to continue empowering our most vulnerable young adults to secure safe and affordable housing, take charge of their education, their career goals and, ultimately, <u>achieve independence</u>.



Bridges is funded with a mix of federal and state funds, and is administered by ODJFS.

"I am currently looking to find my place in society – and Bridges filled that gap. My Bridges Liaison filled that gap."

Bridges participant (2018)