



September 21, 2020

Dear Representative Susan Manchester,

The *Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board* serves as the statewide youth advisory board of young people, ages 14 - 24 years old, who have experienced foster care. *ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)* is a statewide foster care alumni group that exists to improve outcomes after foster care.

We are writing to thank you for your heartfelt concern regarding the need for a larger pool of foster parents in the state of Ohio, to congratulate you on the success of House Bill 8, and to propose a follow-up effort to ***Make Every Training Hour Count*** when it comes to effectiveness.

Thank you for caring about and responding to the shortage of foster parents in Ohio. We understand that the goals of House Bill 8 are for potential foster parents to be trained, licensed and approved in a more expeditious matter. Expanding Ohio's network of foster parents is a great first step – the next step forward is to ***Make Every Training Hour Count*** by equipping Ohio foster parents as subject matter experts.

The vision of Ohio foster care youth and alumni is for Ohio to ***Make Every Training Hour Count*** through training tracks, followed by specialized certifications. Here are some examples of what that might look like:

- Training tracks and subsequent certification will help to prepare and equip foster parents to meet the needs of the children and teens they serve.
- For example, foster parents and caseworkers that serve teens could be empowered to participate in a training track that includes in-depth knowledge of available resources to support foster youth in navigating young adulthood.
- Likewise, PCSAO has been working with others to design three tiers of foster care, paired with a focus on the professionalization of foster parents and capacity building to prepare and support foster parents to meet the needs of youth.
- Each specific training track would lead to specialty certifications, thereby facilitating the ongoing growth of foster parents and empowering them as Subject Matter Experts.

Ohio foster care youth and alumni would like to assist in designing future training tracks, and writing future curriculum for this effort. Several of our members are certified trainers within the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program. The foster care alumni trainer effort was first launched in 2008, and since that time, Ohio foster care alumni have written curriculum for the Bridges program, facilitated workshops for foster parents and caseworkers, and led Core training.

We also wanted to thank you and your office for recognizing and caring about foster youth who were literally living in the offices of Cuyahoga County's Department of Children and Family Services office as a "last resort." This included a 17-year-old who had been there over a month due to the county not having any foster care placements available.

Too often, teens in foster care feel forgotten or unequipped to face life after foster care. This is why we care so deeply about the need to **Make Every Training Hour Count** when it comes to preparing and equipping foster parents and caseworkers to meet the needs of teens.

Here are some of the faces of our youth leaders, reminding others to please: "Don't forget to foster my future."



As one of our members, Jaye Turner, shared in recent testimony to the Ohio Child Welfare Transformation Council: "Foster care is more than just a place to stay; it is a place to connect, educate and grow."

House Bill 8 is a foundational effort to increase Ohio's population of foster parents." So that teens aren't left in offices overnight, or sent to residential facilities because no placement is available. So that children and teens don't need to be sent out of county, or even out of state.

We agree 100% with your quote during a press release on May 13, 2019 that: "It is long overdue that we prioritize foster youth in Ohio." We truly believe that the next step forward is to **Make Every Training Hour Count** and would love to work with your office on this effort.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to the needs of Ohio's foster care youth,

ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)
OHIO YAB (Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board)

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