



Sibling Connections Matter

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board is a statewide organization of young people, ages 14-24, who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care, including foster care, kinship care, adoption, group homes and residential facilities.

The Problem:

- **Section 206 of the federal Fostering Connections Act** requires states to make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster, kinship or adoptive placement. If siblings are not placed together, the state is required to provide frequent visitation and other ongoing interaction between them.
- **Unfortunately, this federal policy does not translate into consistent practice** in our state. Current and former foster youth throughout the state of Ohio have submitted written and video testimonies about being separated from siblings, and the emotional impact that it had on them.

The Solution:

- **Children and teens in foster care should be placed with their siblings** unless it is determined not to be in their best interest. In cases where siblings are separated, diligent efforts should be made to maintain significant contact unless it is documented as not to be in the best interest of the siblings. Siblings should be prioritized in visitation and permanency planning discussions and contact with siblings should be encouraged in adoptive or guardianship placements.
- **Preserving and promoting sibling relationships** has been found to result in better outcomes for youth, including greater placement stability, with less placement disruptions; fewer days in placement; higher rates of reunification; increased likelihood of achieving permanency, outside of reunification; fewer emotional and behavioral difficulties; increased mental well-being; improved school performance; and a smoother adjustment to new placements.

The Ask:

- **Propose and champion a bill**, with the support and involvement of our group and Adoption Network Cleveland. Ohio has the opportunity and responsibility to do more to identify siblings of children who enter the foster care system, to place siblings together whenever possible, and to maintain contact between separated siblings.

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