



children's defense fund ohio

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RE: Placement crisis in foster care

Leaders for Children in Franklin County and Ohio:

In Ohio and across the nation there is a foster placement crisis that results in a need for emergency housing while young people wait for a placement. Agencies have addressed this emergency situation by allowing youth to stay overnight in offices. This has become an acceptable practice but we cannot allow this to continue. Recent news reports have uncovered that this is occurring in Franklin County as well. In some cases, young people end up sleeping in offices for extended periods of time. Over the past several years, reports have revealed the terrible consequences of letting this practice continue, including reports of sexual assault and trafficking in Cuyahoga County.

Like it or not, emergency housing is needed on a fairly regular basis, despite the best efforts of the children services agency to identify a placement. Temporary housing is certainly not an ideal option, but it is a failure of leadership to ignore the need. Leaders must develop an alternative plan for dealing with emergency housing needs. Creating positive options while youth are waiting does not mean we want it to happen, it means we recognize that it is happening and we care about youth who have that experience.

Each county must have a plan for providing additional services to children after they reach certain time limits while they are waiting for placement. What happens after 4 hours waiting? 12 hours? 24 hours? 1 week? Each time period has the potential to cause more trauma if there is not a clear plan in place to ensure youth get the services they need while waiting for placement. In addition, these plans must include clearly defined roles for staff and partners who are on call on a 24-hour basis to provide supportive

services. In all cases, staff and partners who are on call must be trained in trauma-informed services. Trauma-informed training is especially important if plans include support from sheriff's deputies, as was the case in Cuyahoga County. The plan should also take into consideration the specific needs of youth. There should be at least two emergency housing options, so that youth who pose a risk to themselves or others can receive services separately and safely.

The plan should be developed alongside youth and adults with lived experience in foster care who understand the urgency of this crisis. Many have offered their own personal time to be available for youth who are awaiting placement. There is immense value in a caring adult who asks youth what they need and if there is anyone else they might like to call for additional support. It should also include partners who have expertise in specialized services like counseling. State leaders can provide technical assistance around developing these plans to connect counties with resources like Mobile Response and Stabilization Services, and OhioRISE, among others.

In order for these plans to be effective, there must be transparency and youth and agency staff should have a clear avenue to report when the plan is not being executed. State and county leaders must create a consistent way to respond to reports when the plans are not being implemented properly. The recent establishment of the Youth Ombudsman and the Family Ombudsman are examples of this type of process. While creating plans for youth waiting for placement, we must simultaneously create a comprehensive plan for upstream solutions to reduce the need for emergency housing options.

The [Ohio Children's Budget Coalition](#) released [Creating a Vision of Child Well-Being For Ohio](#), a child-centered agenda of policy priorities and issue briefs with specific recommendations to maintain, protect, and enhance investments in child well-being in the upcoming 2024-2025 biennial state budget. There are two issue briefs that address different aspects of this issue. The recommendations from this report are listed below as well:

- Establish robust, publicly facing SACWIS reporting requirements for children services staff in state statute which will include the following information when a child is placed in an unlicensed setting:
 1. What that setting is (i.e. children services building, hotel, or other location)
 2. How long they were there
 3. Why they were placed there
 4. Their age
 5. Where they transitioned to

- Develop a task force charged with producing policy and infrastructure improvements aimed at ending the use of hoteling in Ohio's child welfare system. Task force members should include, at minimum, child advocates, county and state children services, housing advocates, foster care and mental health agencies, former and current foster youth and alumni, foster parents, and primary families who have experienced the children services system.
- State leaders must demand a shared commitment across state government that includes joint accountability and ownership at both the state and local levels for these youth with multi-system, high-acuity needs and their families.
- State and local leaders representing relevant systems, service providers, and areas of expertise should be convened with a sense of urgency and a clear timeline to develop and implement a comprehensive, child-centered, trauma-informed, multi-system, rapid response approach for youth with high-acuity needs. This approach must factor in the contributing causes of the current crisis, including the complex needs of youth, the relevant market forces, and workforce constraints, as well as potential new resources, such as OhioRISE, tiered foster care, and expansion of intensive crisis services.

It is time to dedicate ourselves to developing this plan. As a community we all have a part to play in creating safe places for youth. Are you available to meet to talk more about how we can collaborate to make this happen?

Warm regards,



Kim Eckhart, Interim Director and Research manager
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio