Department of Children & Youth

FOSTER FORWARD

What Foster Parents Need:

Voices and Priorities to Improve Retention and Care

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) has a long-term goal of reducing the rate of children entering foster care to 2 per 1,000 children or lower by June 2027 by strengthening and stabilizing families. At the same time, as part of Ohio's A Home for Every Child commitment, DCY has a short-term goal to increase licensed foster homes so children who cannot safely remain at home have appropriate placement options.

In the spring of 2026, DCY conducted listening sessions in 12 Ohio counties, with 186 foster parents and caregivers in attendance.

This issue brief summarizes what parents and caregivers shared about their needs, concerns, and priorities as foster parents.

Questions for Foster Parents

What motivated you to become a foster parent, and has that motivation changed over time?

What experiences have made fostering rewarding enough for you to continue?

What challenges have you experienced while fostering that made you consider stopping?

What additional support (either for you or youth placed in your home) would help you continue fostering long-term?

What changes to the foster care system would most improve foster parent retention?

What types of training or resources have been the most helpful in supporting you as a foster parent?

Key Motivations to *Become* a Foster Parent

- **Family Planning:** Wanting to grow or start a family, including taking in siblings so they could stay together.
- **Previous Exposure to Foster Care:** Through friends, family, personal experience, or community events involving foster families.
- **Impact:** Wanting to make a positive impact and/or feeling like they had the resources to do so.

Key Motivations to *Continue* as a Foster Parent

- **Witnessing Developmental Progress:** Seeing a child grow, achieve academic success.
- **Forming Relationships and Connections:** With foster children, biological families, or other foster families.
- **Positive System Experience:** Supportive casework, helpful agency interactions, and access to needed resources.
- **Impact:** Making a positive impact on the world.

Key *Challenges* Faced by Foster Parents

Behavioral Health

Attendees described experiencing challenges with children's **behavior and emotional regulation**, both trauma-related and not, and noted that some children **showed changes in behavior or emotional regulation** following family visitations.

Systemic Issues

Individuals described **communication and coordination challenges** with counties, private agencies, caseworkers, and other service providers; **limited training and support**; placement or reunification delays; and system inconsistencies.

Fairness & Safety Concerns

Foster parents noted safety concerns raised during investigations and described navigating **allegations** involving foster children or biological families, often **without adequate support**. They emphasized the need for reports to be handled with **care and credibility**.

Care & Financial Resources

Foster parents expressed that existing **financial resources** and supports **did not fully meet the range of needs** involved in placement. Many emphasized the need for **more accessible healthcare, child care, and respite care**.

> *"We are bringing trauma children into a structured home with strangers… More trauma. Sometimes it's hard balancing out time with other children in the house because of behaviors of the children in care."*
>
> — Current Ohio Foster Parent

> *"The stipends could be more, for sure, as the prices have increased and the cost of living has increased as well. Child care is extremely expensive, so the need for additional support is considerable."*
>
> — Current Ohio Foster Parent

CALL TO ACTION

What State and Local Government Can Do

Support-Based Improvements

- **Training:** Offer more individualized training for foster parents, tailored to specific situations or needs.
- **Support Groups:** Increase opportunities for foster parent community connection and peer support.
- **Autonomy:** Explore opportunities to support foster parents' involvement in daily and long-term decision-making within existing policy guidelines.
- **Transportation/Care:** Offer transportation and child care for training workshops.
- **Respite Care:** Expand access to reliable respite options and improve clarity around availability and processes.

Operational-Based Improvements

- **Policies:** Update visitation and reunification policies.
- **System Consistency:** Increase consistency in regulations, training, and expectations statewide.
- **Resources:** Provide greater resources to help foster parents navigate the foster care system (centralized 'Resource Hub').
- **Communication:** Strengthen coordination and information-sharing between agencies and foster parents.
- **Prioritize Caseworker Retention:** Strengthen supports for caseworkers, including workload relief and professional development opportunities.