



Family Building Blocks

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AND FAMILIES TOGETHER

January 27, 2025



To: House Committee on Early Childhood and Community Services
From: Patrice Altenhofen, Executive Director, Family Building Blocks
Re: HB 2842, Court and Community Care



Family Building Blocks is writing in support of HB 2842, to continue and expand Court and Community Care in Marion County. From our experience as a past provider of Court and Community Care in Polk County, we believe this program is essential to ensuring children are in a safe and nurturing environment while parents or guardians attend court proceedings, conduct court-related business, or attend to sensitive personal matters.

Without Court and Community Care, children who are brought to the courthouse are either allowed to stay in courtrooms, exposed to the potentially traumatic details that can be disclosed in legal proceedings, or they are asked to sit in the hallways unattended. Neither option is a good one.



The Court and Community Care program established by HB 3067 in 2017 solved this problem for hundreds of children in Polk County. These children were protected from witnessing traumatic court proceedings and allowed litigants, advocates, and court staff to give their full attention to court business. These children were instead cared for in our high-quality early childhood environments being cared for by professionals as they played with their peers. **Parents expressed sincere gratitude for this resource, some saying it was “life-changing.”**

Court and Community Care also improves access to justice for low-income families. The lack of affordable, quality childcare should not prevent parents and caregivers from complying with mandatory court appearances, obtaining a restraining order, challenging an eviction, or exercising their other legal rights. Court and Community Care provides necessary childcare to allow parents and caregivers to access the courts.



Families served by Family Building Blocks face multiple toxic stressors, such as poverty, incarceration, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental illness. Many end up in the court system at some point. Providing vulnerable families dignified access to justice with the assurance that their children will be safe is vital to breaking negative cycles poverty so often creates.

We strongly encourage passage HB 2842. Thank you for your consideration.