

Testimonial to the ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES & FOOD SECURITY

A4365/S3301 – The Community Recovery & Family Success Bill

As issued by Jorge Cruz, Executive Director-Local Initiatives Support Corporation-New Jersey Office

Date – March 10, 2025

Time: 10 am

Good morning to the members of the Committee. Let me first thank Assemblyman Atkins, Assemblywoman Speight and Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson and the remaining co-sponsors for bringing A4365, this crucial bill, for the Committee's consideration.

I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the New Jersey office of LISC, the nation's largest Community Development Financial Institution. In our nearly 40 years of operating in New Jersey – as one of 38 field offices serving virtually the entire US footprint – LISC and our affiliates have deployed over o\$1.5 billion of financial capital, grant and capacity-building support for numerous housing and community development projects situated in over 40 low- to moderate-income communities here in New Jersey, but more importantly, to directly invest in over 210 New Jersey-based, community development organizations – almost entirely of nonprofit status – who on the ground doing the real and hard work in some of our most opportunity-challenged communities. We are here primarily to do our best to speak in their collective organizational voices and, more importantly, the voices for hundreds of thousands of opportunity-challenged families served by these same organizations – and merging their important voices with the Family Success Institute Learning Community, of which we are a proud member, who has been the primary driver of this important legislation.

This bill could not come at a more pivotal time not only given the current climate and actions taken by federal government, but for the following core factors:

First, establishing the Council for Community Recovery and Family Success to serve as a much-needed, state-level mechanism to figure out how to better integrate the delivery of the most utilized government-sponsored programs and services that will not only yield higher utilization rates of these important services, but administered in a far more efficient, user-friendly and performance-driven frame.

Greater impact and greater accountability – reason number one.

Second, enabling the appointment of 13 public members comprised of a diverse, representative group of service providers, advocates and community reps will result in a steady structure of on-the-ground to state-level leadership to ensure a real, representative frame to directly affect decision- and policy-making in how government-sponsored programs impacted by the bill are funded and delivered.

Community representation and a collective private/public frame – reason number two.

The last thing that I'd like to stress is how this legislation is largely based on the full, comprehensive family success frame in how services should cover the full financial success spectrum – as compared to where many programs primarily if not exclusively confront crisis and crisis only, without a next step or some defined ladder to move away from crisis. A4365 looks to string and bundle how services are better blended and connected to longer-term, permanent financial independence. Within the bill's proposed collaborative construct, the bill intends to build a fairly long yet attainable pathway comprised of customized tools to not only meet families where they're at now, but to apply additional tools along this tailored pathway leading to sustainable financial stability. Even for our most income-challenged families, A4365 intends to in turn yield regular, unwavering economic progress for ALL of our communities.

Moving strictly from a distressed-basis to a more complete, success-based continuum – reason number three.

For these and many more reasons, in addition to respectfully requesting the Committee's consideration, I know I speak for the full Family Success Institute Learning Community in pledging to do our part to inserting the mix of our own financial and intellectual capital to ensure this bill reaches its intended outcomes and realizes the sort of lasting systemic progress that are so needed now and going forward. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Jorge Cruz, Executive Director-LISC-NJ/Member of the Family Success Institute Learning Community