

Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee
HB 340 Proponent Testimony
Matthew Battiato, Director of Lake County Job and Family Services

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Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of efforts to allow county departments of job and family services greater flexibility in accessing information already known to our agency systems. My name is Matthew Battiato and I am the director of Lake County Job and Family Services. Our agency administers Lake County’s public assistance, child protective services, child support enforcement, and workforce development programs.

Allowing the appropriate staff within the county view-only access to the information already contained in our various information systems will provide better customer service, allow more efficient service delivery, and help our workers in their mission to provide for the health and safety of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

I would like to provide you with some specific examples from counties that demonstrate instances in which information sharing is currently prohibited but makes sense for the agency and the clients being served.

Children Services

The more information a children services worker can have before knocking on a family’s door for the first time, the better prepared that worker is to maintain both their own safety and provide for the safety and well-being of children who are victims of abuse or neglect. Oftentimes, workers are unaware how many children are supposed to be in a home. Allowing workers access to a family’s public assistance or child support enforcement information could help them know how many children they should be checking on, and can also help them quickly find alternative placements with relatives for children who need to be removed from the home.

Allowing the appropriate children services workers access to a family’s public assistance case information can also better streamline the process for agencies to verify if they are eligible for IV-E reimbursement – federal match that is provided for certain children services expenses in serving income-eligible families. Some agencies need to dedicate a worker to managing the bureaucracy of providing the necessary documentation to prove IV-E eligibility and in some cross-county cases, the documentation can be delayed and the federal time frame for reimbursement missed. Allowing a children services worker view-only access to the public assistance information systems would eliminate much of the bureaucracy currently necessary in this process.

Child Support

One factor in determining the amount of child support owed is whether or not the child has an open Medicaid case, disability payment, or private insurance. Allowing appropriate child support enforcement agency staff access to Ohio Benefits would enable them to more quickly determine the amount owed by non-custodial parents.

In addition, allowing appropriate child support workers access to view information in SACWIS will enable them to know if a child support order should be modified due to that child's removal from the obligee's home.

Public Assistance Integrity

Allowing income maintenance staff information to SETS would provide them the ability to verify income for recipients. It also could help them to verify the composition of assistance groups within the same household. In addition, access to SACWIS could help staff identify assistance group composition changes due to a child being removed from the home, or placed with foster parents or kinship caregivers.

These are just a few program-specific examples highlighting opportunities to better streamline operations and better provide for the health and safety of the families we serve. It makes no business sense that clients must often time share the same information, even with the same workers in some smaller counties, multiple times a day. Or why, when walking in to a county agency, the front desk worker can assist them immediately on a work support program, but can't perform even simple tasks on their child support case.

Every day, county directors and staff are making decisions involving the most sensitive and personal aspects of a person and family's well-being. Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for legislation designed to better leverage information known to our systems to better serve our clients and better protect some of our most vulnerable citizens. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.