



Ohio House of Representatives
Community and Family Advancement Committee

May 16, 2018

Proponent Testimony on HB 533

Witness: Mark Mecum, CEO, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies

Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on HB 533.

My name is Mark Mecum; I am the CEO of the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA). Founded in 1973 as Ohio's first statewide child advocacy organization, OACCA provides leadership for Ohio's at-risk children, families, and community providers. Our membership is composed of over seventy community agencies throughout the State of Ohio that provide foster care, adoption, and mental health services to over 130,000 children and their family members.

I am also co-chair of the Ohio Foster Care Advisory Group, which was established in HB 49 (132nd G.A.). The duties of the Advisory Group are to review and provide recommendations to the Governor, ODJFS Director, and legislative leaders by May 1, 2018 on the topics of improving and streamlining foster caregiver certification requirements, improving how to deliver and sustain supports to foster caregivers caring for children affected by parental drug use, and determining best practices in identifying and recruiting foster caregivers. The Advisory Group completed its report of recommendations in late April 2018 and submitted it to the Director of ODJFS.

HB 533 addresses many of the same issues that are contained in the Advisory Group report. HB 533 would lower the state minimum hour requirements for individuals interested in becoming foster caregivers. It would also expand qualified persons to perform home study assessments of prospective foster caregivers. We support these goals and believe the Advisory Group's recommendations do as well.

In regards to the first issue contained in HB 533, foster caregiver training, the Advisory Group proposed a slightly different approach that basically achieves the same goal.

Presently, the Revised Code requires prospective foster caregivers to receive 36 hours, minimally, of approved training before they can officially apply. The Revised Code also requires foster caregivers receive either 40 or 60 hours, minimally, of ongoing training to maintain their certification. (60 hours is required for “specialized” foster caregivers). These minimum training hour standards are among the highest in the country.

The Advisory Group recommended that the minimum hours be removed from the Revised Code and instead be established and maintained in the Administrative Code, through rule promulgation by ODJFS. That would enable ODJFS to have flexibility to reduce the hours and significantly restructure how the training is delivered. The goal is to have prospective foster caregivers approved quicker, and focus their initial “pre-placement” training on child safety and other general topics. The remaining required topics would be required post-certification.

In regard to the second issue contained in HB 533, home study assessors, the Advisory Group offered two recommendations. First, ODJFS should establish a statewide registry of approved assessors thereby enabling them to conduct ongoing needs assessments of the quantity and capacity of assessors. The registry would also be accessible to foster care and adoption agencies to serve as a clearinghouse for employment purposes. I believe this work is already underway.

In closing, OACCA supports the goals of HB 533 and we commend Representative Pelanda and the co-sponsors for taking leadership to address what is a very real crisis in our state: a shortage of available foster homes. Record numbers of children are entering child protective services custody and require placement in family settings including certified foster homes. We must do everything we can to not just recruit and retain foster caregivers, but also speed up the process of approving homes without jeopardizing child safety. HB 533 is a bold step in the right direction. We are hopeful that the Committee considers its merits and also takes into consideration the good ideas offered in the Advisory Group report.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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