



Ohio Children's Alliance

Leading change for child and family service providers

Ohio House of Representatives
Community and Family Advancement Committee

December 6, 2018

Proponent Testimony on HB 533

Witness: Mark Mecum, CEO, Ohio Children's Alliance

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 Substitute HB 533.

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

The bill before you today, Substitute HB 533, is an essential part of our state's response to the Opiate crisis. The bill has the full support of our association and we commend Representative Pelanda, co-sponsors, and this committee, for their leadership.

As you know, the Opiate crisis has caused unprecedented strain on families and communities across our state. Child abuse and neglect investigations are occurring at high rates. Record amount of children are entering child protective services custody and removed from their parents care. These children need loving homes so that they can continue growing up and heal from the effects of trauma.

When kin are not available to care for these children, we rely on our state's network of trained, licensed, and approved foster caregivers. Foster caregivers are heroes in our communities, and sadly, we do not have enough of them. There are many aggressive efforts underway to grow our foster home capacity, but despite these efforts, we have a massive shortage today. We must think outside the box to attract more families and improve the speed in which they can be trained, licensed, and approved. Substitute HB 533 would do just that.

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Consistent with the Foster Care Advisory Group's recommendations, the bill would remove the minimum training hour amounts from the Revised Code, thereby permitting the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) to re-design the training program and set new minimum hour amounts.

With this authority, we are confident ODJFS would promulgate rules to re-structure Ohio's foster care training program so that foster caregivers can become licensed faster, but still receive all the training courses they need within a few months of being licensed. We are also confident that these changes to our foster care system would result in Ohio maintaining a top-notch training program and a network of high-quality foster homes.

We urge you to approve this bill today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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