



Representative Janine Boyd and Representative Jeff Rezabek

Sponsor Testimony Sub. HB 126-June 19, 2018

Thank you Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee for hearing sponsor testimony for Substitute House Bill 126. I also want to thank my Joint Sponsor, Representative Rezabek, his patience, guidance, and his experience with those whom we aim to assist through this bill have been invaluable.

Sub. House Bill 126 is the product of many discussions, interested party meetings and multiple committee hearings with no opposition testimony and voted favorably out of the Community and Family Advancement Committee, unanimously. Although this legislation has gone through a few changes since last General Assembly, the context and the goals remain the same. It is a call to us to assist those who have answered the call to care for our most vulnerable citizens. It is an opportunity for this body to assist our kinship caregivers, as they intervene in situations of crisis.

First, I think it is necessary to define a few basic terms. Kinship caregiver is defined (ORC section 5101.85) as, and unchanged by this legislation, any of the following adults caring for a child in place of the parents: grandparents (up to "great-great-great"), siblings, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces (up to "great-grand"), first cousins and first cousins once removed, stepparents and stepsiblings, spouses and former spouses of the above individuals, a legal guardian of the child, or a legal custodian of the child. More often than not, the parents of these children are facing incarceration, addiction and substance abuse, and even death.

Second, kinship navigators are defined by Ohio Revised Code, section 5101.851 as a statewide program of kinship care navigators to assist kinship caregivers who are seeking information regarding, or assistance obtaining, services and benefits available at the state and local levels that address the needs of those caregivers residing in each county. The program shall provide to kinship caregivers information and referral services and assistance obtaining support services. Some of the services may include access to publicly funded child care, respite care, training for special needs children, legal services, as well as access to a toll-free number for additional assistance.

Unfortunately, this section of Ohio Revised Code is permissive and with local Jobs and Family Services already feeling the burn in terms of local dollars, most Ohio counties have not been able to provide this service. The legislation before you, changes that. In this climate of addiction crisis, it is necessary to create a system where all kinship caregivers in Ohio have equitable access to vital services, as they step up to care for these children who are facing some of the most



traumatic, unpredictable and stressful moments of their lives. We can do better and must do better for our most vulnerable populations.

Sub. House Bill 126 requires the implementation of a statewide program of kinship navigators, but to efficiently and strategically establish an effective program, the bill allows the Director of Jobs and Family Services one year after the effective date to adopt rules in accordance with this legislation. Sub. HB 126 would require a few basic standards in implementing this language.

- Sub. HB 126 requires the Director of ODJFS to establish a system of as few as 5 and up to 12 regions for the statewide program of kinship care navigators.
- These regions will be based on population, number of kinship caregivers, available kinship navigator expertise, as well as any other relevant factors needed to create stable and functional navigator regions.
- Kinship navigators will become permanent and mandatory in this bill, current language in the revised code is permissive.
- The regional navigators will provide information, referral services, and assistance in obtaining support services for kinship caregivers within its region.

Programs and policies come with a price tag; this was one of the changes made to the bill once we adopted the substitute language. Originally, the bill relied on TANF Title IV A dollars and the substitute changed that to general fund dollars to operationalize the program. We know that not all kinship caregivers would qualify for TANF and verifying their eligibility would also be problematic within the confines of this program. LSC estimates the program- statewide and at the point of full operation – will cost \$6.5 million a year. However, according to JFS and other stakeholders including PCSAO, the state will realize a long-term savings by keeping children with appropriate family members and out of foster care.

Additionally, recently we learned that federal IV E dollars will soon be further defined to include a 50/50 match to states for the funding of kinship caregiver programs such as this one. In this version of the bill you'll find language that allows the Director of Jobs and Family Services to apply for those dollars once they are made available by our policy makers in DC.

Thank you again, Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and esteemed Members of the House Finance Committee for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony for Substitute House Bill 126. We're happy to answer any questions from the committee at this time.