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Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 198

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House Civil Justice Committee

Chairman Hambley, Vice-Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to come and speak about HB 198. I would also like to thank my joint sponsor, now former State Representative, Sarah LaTourette. HB 198 would help ensure that money provided by parents for the care of our neediest children stays with these children. I ask for your support in protecting Ohio families by supporting this bill.

HB 198 revises the law governing child and spousal support payments collected on behalf of a needy family receiving temporary cash assistance through Ohio Works First. This temporary cash assistance is one of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. Under federal law, families receiving public assistance under this program must cooperate with child support establishment and enforcement efforts. In addition, TANF recipients must assign their rights to child support payments to the state. Let me repeat that to make sure it is clear – TANF recipients must assign their rights to child support payments to the state.

States, however, have the option of allowing the child support payment to be passed through to the parent and child and disregarded when determining TANF assistance, meaning the amount would not be considered income for purposes of determining TANF eligibility. A growing number of states have recognized that federal law is counter-productive and now half of the states have instead chosen various ways of passing through child support without reducing the family's TANF assistance.

HB 198 does this for Ohio, allowing child support payments to stay with the child instead of assigning it to the state. It also allows for up to \$200 per month to be disregarded in terms of income determination for eligibility requirements.

I want to pause and make sure this sinks in. A family of three has to make less than \$10,390 a year to qualify for temporary cash assistance through TANF. Under current law in Ohio in order to receive needed cash assistance, a single mother with two children living in poverty must

forfeit to the government the money that the father is paying to help care for their children. Of note, TANF has been running a large surplus, with over \$500 million in excess at the end of fiscal year 2017. While I anticipate this surplus will be allocated by the end of the budget process towards important childcare programs, we shouldn't be contributing to further surplus by taking money from our neediest children.

This is harmful to our kids, and it is harmful to mothers and fathers. Ohio does quite well nationally on child support enforcement and collections, with custodial parents (most frequently mothers) receiving a little over 70% of the money that is owed. However for any one family this may vary month to month. Many mothers simply cannot consistently rely on these funds for the daily expense of feeding and caring for their children. Those who qualify for temporary cash assistance still need the support fathers can provide, but also need this additional regular income to put food on the table each day. The average monthly benefit we are talking about is \$203.58.

For fathers or non-custodial mothers, this policy is harmful as well. There are plenty of data that demonstrate child support helps to promote engagement in child rearing and strengthens fatherhood. However, if a father knows that money he is paying to help provide for his children is instead diverted into a government program there is much less incentive to make these payments. This is itself counter to one of the four statutory purposes of TANF - 'encourage the formation and maintenance of two parent families.'

Ohio should join the half of the states that understand child support is money that parents pay for their children. We should allow families to keep this money, especially in times of extreme hardship. I ask for your support and would be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you.