



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Criminal Justice Committee
Interested Party Testimony on HB558
May 28, 2020
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Chair Lang, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present interested party testimony regarding HB558, Child abuse in military families—report to military authorities, on behalf of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) and its member agencies. PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio’s county Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for and promotes child protection program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families and supportive communities.

PCSAO acknowledges and thanks Rep. Abrams for reaching out to local children services agencies and to the Association to obtain direct feedback on this bill. We appreciate her intent in bringing this bill forward, which is to ensure that every possible resource is used to address and support families involved in child abuse and neglect.

Based on our review of HB558, we offer the following for your consideration.

- 1) The bill requires PCSAs to report to military authorities if a member of the armed services is the subject of a child abuse and neglect investigation. By requiring PCSAs to report during the investigation phase, there will be times when the PCSA reports an allegation that turns out to be unfounded. We request that you consider carefully if you wish to require PCSAs to report to military authorities at the investigation phase, or after an investigation is completed and substantiated.

- 2) We are aware of at least three counties that have instituted practices of working directly with military officials in the state. Currently, Greene, Montgomery and Warren county PCSAs have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Wright–Patterson Air Force Base that outline information sharing protocols and how each PCSA works with the Base. They permit, rather than mandate, reporting at the investigation phase, leaving the decision to the PCSA director’s discretion based upon best interest of the child. PCSAs report that this model works well, so we offer it for consideration.

- 3) Finally, we know that military families reside in all parts of Ohio. However, it is difficult to envision how to operationalize the bill’s implied requirement that each PCSA shall have an MOU with the military authority of each service branch, regardless if a military base is in its county. We request that consideration be given to permitting, rather than mandating, the establishment of MOUs between PCSAs and military authorities.

We look forward to continuing to explore these considerations with Rep. Abrams and the Committee as you work on HB558. I can be contacted at mary@pcsao.org and 614.648.1450 to answer questions and for more information.

Thank you.