

# TUSCARAWAS COUNTY CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



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House Finance Committee  
Testimony of Traci Berry, Esq.  
Director, Tuscarawas County CSEA  
Sub. HB166

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and Members of the Committee, my name is Traci Berry and I am the Director of the Tuscarawas County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) and the 2019 President of the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association (OCDA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Sub HB 166. We come before you today to renew our request for additional funding for county CSEAs.

County Child Support Agencies are on the front lines in providing services to over one million children in Ohio. We are much more than a collection agency. We work hard every day to establish parentage, establish and enforce child support and medical support orders, locate parents, and modify orders when family circumstances have changed. However, our county agencies are facing many obstacles in serving our families. We are seeing an increasing number of relative caregivers such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and adult siblings come to us for help for the children they are caring for in their homes. These are difficult cases with multiple families and a variety of needed services. We have rising costs for technology and personnel.

Many of our counties are also operating with less money due to a change in our funding formula last year.

In Tuscarawas County, our CSEA helps over 24,000 men, women, and children. We have done so with shrinking resources since 2005. By 2012, I was forced to lay off one-third of my staff. We have survived by being innovative and frugal and we remain determined to make a difference in the lives of the children in our program. As the Governor said, a child has but one chance to grow up, and the Tuscarawas County CSEA works diligently every day to ensure that our children receive their child support.

Tuscarawas County has changed its approach over the years to make an 18+ year relationship with our families less intimidating and more customer-friendly from our first contact. We greet new parents and caregivers personally and arm them with the information and knowledge necessary to navigate the child support system and to make the best decisions for their unique situations. We've been recognized across the state for our approach. It's our people who have made this approach work, because they are parents and relative caregivers too.

But we are at a crossroads. We have a digital filing system that's more microfiche than useful. We are taking advantage of the Enterprise Document Management System (EDMS), which is an imaging system to increase efficiencies across the state, but in order to do so I was forced to choose between replacing a retiring employee or buying into EDMS. The EDMS will not do her job. Her job is to conduct support order modifications and explain that process to families. It's something that cannot be automated. Yet the statewide document management system will enable our employees to keep track of the necessary paperwork in a more effective and efficient manner. Our copiers and scanners are too old to talk to the new system so they must be replaced. We need more outreach to the public, the private bar and the courts, but do not have the personnel to further these key relationships. We want to take advantage of simple things such as text message reminders of hearings, but we cannot afford the software.

Tuscarawas County was one of the counties who lost funding with the change in the allocation methodology for state dollars. We lost 24% of our funding; funding necessary to serve our families. Counties across Ohio are forced to choose between customer service and upgrading equipment, technology advancement and staffing levels necessary to do the work our families need. If our program isn't appropriately funded, we will fail our children. Paternity will not be established, support will not be collected, and back support will go unpaid. Help us prevent this crisis.

We also ask for restoration of mandatory language included in the as-introduced version of HB166 with regard to child support policy. The required provisions were removed in the sub bill. If Ohio does not adopt these provisions, it puts the TANF block grant at risk. These provisions include: 3119.023, 3119.05 (I)(5), (J), and (O), 3119.27, 3119.29, 3119.30, 3119.302, 3119.31, 3119.32, and 3125.25.

Child Support is key to over one million children in Ohio. Please support our request for \$3 million dollars in state funding to line item 600502 to harness an additional 6 million in federal funding. We believe Ohio cannot have a budget focused on children and families without adequately funding the child support program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.