

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 8
Representative Susan Manchester
May 21, 2019

Good morning Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 8, a priority piece of legislation that will help increase the number of foster families within the state.

Over the past few years, the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic have been seen throughout Ohio. A lesser known impact of this crisis is that the number of children in Ohio's foster care system has increased by 25%. Today, there are more than 15,000 boys and girls in foster care.

In my District, I have had the opportunity to meet with those who work extremely hard to support our children in the foster care system-parents, caseworkers, and others. These dedicated individuals work hard every day to ensure that none of our kids fall through the cracks. These folks are the ones who first alerted me to the fact that currently, children are sometimes placed far away from their relatives in other counties and states, including children in my District sent as far as Cleveland or Kentucky.

House Bill 8 brings much needed support to help recruit and retain foster caregivers in Ohio. This legislation is the result of recommendations from the Foster Care Task Force at ODJFS that met during the last General Assembly, which you should all have copies of. House Bill 8 will allow ODJFS to adapt to the needs of the foster care system in times of crisis. The people at ODJFS are on the frontlines of these situations. They know the current needs in foster care, and are in a much better position to make rules accordingly. This bill does not lower the standards to become a foster caregiver. Instead, it will give ODJFS the authority and flexibility to establish these requirements for foster families rather than mandating the standards in the Revised Code. Providing more flexibility for foster families will give them the ability to focus more on taking care of the child in need, rather than jumping through unnecessary hoops required in statute.

House Bill 8 also revises foster caregiver training by eliminating the statutory mandate on pre placement training hours, training hours and continuing education hours, in addition to the statutory training plans, coursework and needs assessment requirements. It also allows up to 20% of pre placement training to be taken online. One of my constituents, who is one of the few foster parents in her home county, has expressed how much of a barrier in-person training can be for prospective foster parents. She stated that oftentimes the closest training she was able to attend was 30 miles away, which required taking time off work and finding a babysitter. Sometimes trainings are cancelled due to inclement weather and then rescheduled at inconvenient times. Allowing foster parents to do some online training will preclude these barriers and save prospective parents time and money.

I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this legislation, which will allow ODJFS to better support our children, as well as foster caregivers. I would also like to thank the Foster Care Task Force at ODJFS for their hard work in crafting this legislation.

Again, thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify and to Rep. Galonski for her partnership on this legislation. I welcome your questions.