

Summit County Children Services

House Bill 8 Proponent Statement

Summit County Children Services (SCCS) is experiencing a phenomenon of rapid increase in the volume of children in need of services. This has resulted in a correlative increase to the amount of children in the custody of SCCS and the need to place them with appropriate foster families. There has been no similar increase in the amount of licensed foster families, and the need to place children with such families has quickly overwhelmed the ability. SCCS has made strides to recruit and license foster families, but the training and licensing process is cumbersome and wrought with stringent restrictions. Reform of the laws governing the training and licensing of foster families is necessary to improve the training process and requirements, add flexibility, and ultimately increase the rate of available foster families.

Much as the needs and abilities of every child are unique, the same is true for current and prospective foster families. The current one-size-fits-all system is antiquated and fails to address the diverse nature of contemporary foster families. By shifting training and licensing requirements from laws fixed in the Ohio Revised Code to rules prescribed by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS), the process to become a foster family will be streamlined, more efficient, and focused to the unique needs and abilities of each family. ODJFS will have the ability to provide an intensive but less restrictive training process for the initial foster licensure to ensure that more prospective families become licensed in a shorter time period to meet the growing needs to place foster children. Further, ODJFS will provide specific training for families in their first two years of earning the fostering license to ensure they are being supported and being provided the training that best fits their ongoing needs and abilities. Additionally, as much of today's world is lived on the internet, allowing foster parents to complete more of their training online is necessary.

As Ohio is reevaluating and adapting this foster care training and licensing process, there have been recent changes to federal law that further necessitate the passage of House Bill 8. By 2021, Ohio will be expected to be compliant with the changes in the requirements for foster care licensure brought forth by the Family First Prevention Services Act. ODJFS will be able to ensure timely compliance with such federal laws and regulations.

The needs of children serviced by public children services agencies across Ohio are greater now than ever. They also continually become more diverse. Ohio's system for training and licensing foster families must maintain the pace and ability to meet the needs of these children. In order to do so, the system must be adjusted from set laws that are not easily changed, to rules the ODJFS can study and adjust as required by the continual challenges of child welfare. ODJFS is trusted to regulate Ohio's child welfare system; it is crucial that ODJFS is also trusted to establish current, appropriate rules to ensure safety, efficiency, and flexibility in the training of Ohio's foster families.