



Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association
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**Ohio House Health Committee
House Bill 14
May 28, 2019**

Chairman Merrin, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of House Bill 14. My name is Joel Potts and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association and we greatly appreciate the sponsors, Representatives Boyd and Baldrige, for championing the call for a statewide kinship navigator program.

When a child needs to be removed from his or her home due to unsafe conditions or neglect, children services workers first check to see if there is a suitable extended family member, or kin, to care for the child. Kinship placements are less traumatic for the child than being placed with an unfamiliar family or in an unfamiliar community. Kinship placements are more stable while permanency options are explored and depending on the circumstances of the case, offer a much better alternative than the foster care system.

The number of kinship placements (both formal, where the public children service agency maintains custody, and informal, where the agency does not hold custody but the child is in the care of a relative outside of the mother and/or father) is on the rise. In recent years we have seen a significant increase in the number of kinship placements as a result of the opioid crisis and other substance abuses.

Kinship providers can quickly find themselves in very challenging circumstances while assisting the children in their care. Often these children come from extremely traumatic circumstances including physical abuse, neglect, substance abuse, witnessing crimes, observing their own parents' overdose and even death. Behavioral health issues, stress (on all the members of the family) and the sudden costs and need for resources can quickly overwhelm the kinship household. Unfortunately, most kinship providers have nowhere to turn for guidance and assistance.

House Bill 14 would establish a statewide kinship navigator program to assist kinship providers support and provide direction to help address needs such as child care, training related to the special needs of the children in their care, legal services and a tollfree number that may be called to obtain basic information about the rights of and services available to, kinship caregivers.

Kinship providers are standing by their extended family members in a time of crisis and doing the right thing for the child. House Bill 14 supports these families, will enhance Ohio's kinship provider network and result in better outcomes for Ohio's children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions.