



Ohio House Health Committee
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
House Bill 8 – Foster Caregivers
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Good morning, Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the committee. I am Kimberly Hall, director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, to discuss foster caregivers in House Bill 8.

Nearly 16,000 children are in protective care outside their homes in Ohio. Compared to five years ago, over 3,000 more Ohio children are living away from their homes because their parents are not able to care for them safely. Many of these children are having to stay in care longer. They have very complex needs that require complex treatment. But there are too few foster caregivers in Ohio, with nearly 8,000 licensed foster families around the state. I will spend the next few minutes outlining the problem and the solution this legislation offers. I welcome the opportunity later to respond to your questions.

Foster caregivers care for children when their own parents cannot, until a court decides that it's safe for a child to return home. Foster caregivers sometimes work directly with birth parents, teaching them skills, encouraging them, and sharing information about their children. Most children return to their birth parents or another relative or family friend within a year, but sometimes it takes longer.

To try and alleviate the lack of foster caregivers, our Fiscal Year 2020-21 budget request sought to move Ohio's foster care training hours from law to rule, in accordance with one of the recommendations of the Foster Care Advisory Group, which was created because of House Bill 49 of the 132nd General Assembly. The group was a collaboration of ODJFS, foster caregivers, public and private foster care agencies, and the organizations that represent them. Members were charged with identifying and implementing best practices to recruit, retain and support foster caregivers.

Moving foster care training hours from law to rule will allow flexibility for future adjustments. The advisory group also recommended reducing the number of required training hours to focus on core caregiver readiness skills. Presently, Ohio requires more training hours than any other state, and these requirements have disincentivized recruitment.

Other recommended changes by the advisory group included restructuring ongoing training for new caregivers, restructuring ongoing training for foster caregivers who have completed their initial certification period, and permitting more alternative training formats. All of these changes, we believe, will streamline foster care recruitment efforts and come into alignment with the national model family foster home licensing standards. But more importantly, these changes are intended to begin filling the foster caregiver gap.

Our budget request also sought to allocate \$5 million for staffing foster and kinship family recruitment and support. This is a vitally important effort that will help alleviate the need to place children far away from relatives, in other counties or even other states. Other statewide efforts to improve recruitment include a website and public information campaign, FosterAndAdopt.jfs.ohio.gov, where we emphasize that individuals do not need to be wealthy or have advanced degrees to foster and adopt children; they just need “100 Percent Heart.”

So we are embarking on many different initiatives to help with foster caregiver recruitment, but the changes outlined in this bill would help us make even more progress with providing more foster caregivers.

Now more than ever, we need foster caregivers to provide the guidance, support and love to Ohio children. With a pathway to come in line with national standards through this legislation, I believe these changes will enable more Ohioans to step forward to fill these crucial roles. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide my perspective, and I would be happy to answer any questions.