

Ohio House of Representatives
House Finance Committee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
April 10, 2019
Testimony
Jody Walker, Executive Director
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Good Morning Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the budget bill, specifically as it relates to investments in children. My name is Jody Walker and I am the executive director of South Central Ohio Job and Family Services (SCOJFS), which serves Hocking, Ross, and Vinton Counties. We are a quadruple combined agency, responsible for public assistance, child support, workforce development and child welfare. I am joined on this panel by Jerica Estle-Grooms—a young woman with lived experience in foster care, Patty Harrelson, Director of Richland County Children Services Board, and Angela Sausser, Executive Director of PCSAO.

I have spent the past twenty-two years working in child and family services, with close to the last twenty years as a county director responsible for children services. In those twenty years, I have never seen a more critical time as now. As an agency, as a county, and as a system, we have become overwhelmed with the needs of the children and families we serve daily. This is attributed to the opiate/drug crisis, increase in the number of children in care, the increased placement costs, lack of foster homes, and lack of resources.

The custody count in my three counties has remained consistently high for the past several years, as we felt the impact of the opiate crisis in Southern Ohio much sooner, compared to the rest of the state. The disturbing trend we have seen is our cost of care, which has almost doubled in the past five years, as children are staying in care longer. Additionally, we are serving more multi-system children who have severe behavioral problems, which means expensive residential placements.

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As I stated earlier, the cost has been substantial in meeting the needs of the children. When I started as director for SCOJFS, only one county had a levy, the county commissioners in the other two counties paid placement costs above our allocations. We currently have levies in all three counties, but this is not new money to our system. For two of the counties, it reduces what they have had to contribute from their General Revenue Fund, which was a strain on county funds. Our agency uses our levy funds for placement costs only, which is where we need the funds. If our placement costs continue to increase, we would have to look at an additional levy, or help from the county to pay for the costs of care.

In relation to costs, our lack of foster homes, or appropriate placements in the area has impacted our spending for children in custody. Our offices, which are based in South-Central Ohio, have children placed all over the state. It is not uncommon for caseworkers to drive to Lima, Toledo, Cincinnati, Warren, Cleveland, or St. Clairsville on any given day of the week. Because of the increase in the number of children in custody, all the agencies are competing with one another for limited placement options. We are constantly competing with private networks who pay more, to retain foster parents as well as recruit new ones.

In the past year, our agency was faced with finding placement for a multi-system teenage boy, who had severe behavioral problems, developmentally delayed, with a mother who had a substance abuse history. This young man was hospitalized for thirty days at Children's Hospital in Columbus, while we attempted to find placement for him. We were turned down by over thirty providers and were looking out of state when a provider became available. He is currently in Northwest Ohio in a \$380 per day placement and will probably age out of foster care.

As the agency director responsible for this young man, I am sad that this is his likely scenario. Aging out of foster care without a permanent home sets youth up for poor outcomes. I can't help but think how this young man's path may be different if he and his family had received services and treatment before they even came to the attention of my agency. Early identification and access to services and treatment has to be part of any response Ohio develops for multi-system youth.

The multi-system youth in children services custody are the most expensive and hardest to place population. Many of our multi-system children enter custody through the court system, either directly by the courts due to behavioral/mental health issues, or with our agency filing due to safety concerns. While our agency partners well with the other agencies involved with multi-system children, children services are ultimately responsible for the cost of care as the county is responsible to ensure children are in a safe environment.

Between February 1, 2019 and April 8, 2019, our agency had 202 children in custody, with a daily placement cost around \$13,000 per day. Of the 202 children, we had 25 multi-system children who required a residential/secure placement setting. These 25 children, 12% of our total population, cost \$6,000 per day, or 46% of our total daily placement costs. A significant increase in funding is needed to address this issue, as children services, in most cases, is paying the full cost of care without support from other agencies involved.

The proposed investments in children services by Governor DeWine over the next two years will help to begin stabilizing a system that has been overwhelmed. The targeted investments will allow for a much-needed increase in base funding for counties, while creating and expanding programs which target the most at risk populations helped by children services.

While my testimony today has highlighted some of the challenges facing children services in Hocking, Ross, and Vinton Counties, it is not isolated to our agency. This is a statewide issue, affecting families from Ironton to Cleveland. Governor DeWine's proposed budget is a step in the right direction for the children of Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate all support this committee can provide in helping the children and families of Ohio.

Testimony on Children Services Provisions in HB166
HHS Subcommittee, House Finance
April 10, 2019
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Good Morning, Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the Committee. My name is Jerica Estle-Grooms. I am 22 years old. At the age of 12, I, along with my twin brother, and our older two siblings entered foster care due to issues within our primary family. My biological mother died in 2007. My father died in 2008, one year later. I remained in a substitute care setting (through congregate care, kinship care and foster care) from July 3, 2008 until I emancipated at age 18, on June 17, 2014. During my stay in foster care, I was in eight placements. I lived at Wilson Children's Home (a children's residential center) in Adams County, Ohio, on four separate occasions. I resided with my aunt and uncle for three months in 2008; with my adult half-sister for two months in 2008; with a non-relative/kinship caregiver for 21 months in 2012 and with a non-relative foster family for 10 months. The last home is from where I emancipated.

It wasn't until I was 18, that I met my "family," Bobbi and Christopher Grooms of West Union, Ohio. I met the Grooms' family through their oldest daughter, Lizzie, when we both worked at a local restaurant. Bobbi and Chris (known to me as "mom and dad") were previous foster parents and had adopted Lizzie from foster care when she was a young child. Bobbi is also a social worker and has experience as an adoption worker in the public child welfare system. As difficult as things were and as closed off as I had become during my teen years, the Grooms family never gave up on me. They accepted me as part of their family and helped me, emotionally and financially, throughout my emancipation, through college and continue to help support me emotionally, into adulthood. My mom and dad also helped re-establish relationships with biological family members and with my twin brother. In July 2015, I legally accepted their name as my own: Jerica Estle-Grooms. Because of their support, I graduated with my bachelor's degree in Business from Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, in December 2018.

Many people, including caseworkers, supervisors, directors, etc., have referred to me as a success story. What you may not realize is, that in foster care, it can be difficult to form attachments, to make connections and to have the support of family into adulthood. Many children who age out or emancipate from the foster care system, without permanency, face the reality of homelessness, poor education, early pregnancy, inappropriate relationships, increased rates of mental illness and joblessness. Through no fault of their own, I know that if I had remained with my biological family, I would never have received the encouragement or support I needed to attend and graduate from college.

My agency and my family (the Grooms') were able to provide these supports for me. My kinship placements came to be as a result of meeting people within the community during my high school years, where I was able to participate as a cheerleader, homecoming queen and work a job at local restaurants. These activities helped me develop connections with teachers, coaches and other community members that would encourage me to succeed and to not give up on my dreams in life!

I was supported and encouraged by my caseworkers and other staff of Adams County Children Services with working, attending school, graduating high school, going to prom, getting my driver's license, opening a bank account, earning money, completing chores, and many other experiences

“normal” children (meaning children not in the child welfare system), get to experience growing up. Adams County Children Services even purchased items for me for my dorm room when I entered my freshman year and caseworkers collected snacks and other items for me at their own expense, as well.

To this day, if I need anything (documentation, encouragement, whatever it may be), I can go to the agency or call my caseworker and get the help I need. Prior to graduation and since graduation, I have stopped by many times, just to say “thank you” to the staff at Adams County Children Services, who truly care about me (even when I didn’t understand that they did) and were so happy and proud to see me succeed in life. They can understand how hard it is for kids and young adults in my situation to navigate through life without the proper supports.

Many children in foster care that I have met throughout my life, don’t always share the accomplishments and opportunities that I have had. Theirs are often stories of struggle, pain and despair. No matter the situation, it always seemed to come back to that individual not having the appropriate people or supports to rely on. I’m so thankful, as this could have been me, as well.

Many children across Ohio, just like me, are counting on you to help those at the state and county level. If made available, this funding could be used to provide the necessary services which will allow more children who emancipate from foster care the opportunity to succeed and not become a burden on taxpayers. Additionally, it can provide the necessary assistance to recruit more foster/adoptive homes for those children still waiting for permanency within the state child welfare system and provide more options for children who have yet to find their forever home.

Please remember my story as you consider Governor DeWine’s children-focused budget proposal for the State of Ohio that could increase assistance to:

- 1.) Nearly double funding to children service agencies to \$140 million. That includes \$90 million in county-level funding; and
- 2.) \$5 million increase for foster care and family recruitment.

Sincerely,

Jerica Estle-Grooms



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Ohio House of Representatives
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
House Finance
Testimony on HB166

April 10, 2019

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Good morning Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today regarding multi-system youth in Ohio. Honestly, with the complex challenges our kids face, I would argue that all kids in our children services system are multi-system youth. Show me a youth whose parents have neglected him, and I will show you his involvement in at least the educational, child services and mental health systems. I would argue there is not one type of multi-system youth.

There are at least three distinct groups of these kids, potentially more:

- There are those who are abused or neglected by their caregivers, often due to the challenges of serious parenting deficits, mental illness and addictions;
- There are those who present a danger to themselves, their parents and/or their community due to their own mental illness and/or addictions coupled with their unruly or delinquent actions;
- There are those who have significant challenges with developmental or physical disabilities, who are possibly harmful to their parents or others and often have dual diagnosis with mental illness.



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The legal definition of “Dependent Child” is now so convoluted that any child whose parents lack the resources to provide some form of help have been forced (even coached) to give up custody to the children services system. Unfortunately, this is because the federal system of financial support requires a children services agency to have custody of a child in order to secure partial federal reimbursement (typically around 62%), with the balance falling to the county PCSA to fund. However, these federal funds are only available when the family meets low income requirements. Statewide, around 43% of children in residential facilities are not eligible for federal funding. When they do not meet these income requirements, then the county PCSA must cover the entire cost of care, which can average about \$300/day. Frankly, this is placing a serious burden on local governments and their taxpaying citizens.

Stop and think for a minute, what is the true purpose of the children services system? It has always been and should be a system to protect children from the adults in their lives who are abusing and neglecting them, not a system to protect the parents or the community from the youth. Yet, this is what we have become.

Unfortunately, we have no way to separate out the myriad of federal and state rules, regulations and laws for families who want us to access and secure services for their children versus those parents who are a danger to their children. I feel for those folks who have testified before you - that they lost their control over decision making, had to endure court hearings, team meetings and caseworker visits, but there is no other method for us to provide for and pay for services to their children when they are in custody of children services.

Even though it may seem like the only solution for parents is to relinquish custody to children services for these treatment services, the county PCSAs also often lack any viable options for placement. Our staff in Richland County spent 4 months and made 136 different contacts across Ohio and the nation seeking help for one youth who has now been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Her case is so serious, her family will likely never be able to provide care for her and she will likely end up in the adult mental health



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system. She also has serious hearing loss and, we believe, intellectual deficits and she also requires one to one daily care every day.

Almost daily, directors use the PCSAO list serve to communicate about a youth's need for a placement and the number of and reasons for kids being denied is staggering. Five years ago, this used to be the exception, today it is our normal state of operations.

It is a sad, but true reality. Relinquishing a child that is not abused and neglected to the custody of a county PCSA, does not mean their needs have been resolved. We struggle just as much as parents in trying to find a viable placement option that can meet their multi-system needs.

Therefore, I would ask the Subcommittee to take its time on this very serious and complicated issue. These youth need our time, attention and most of all, a sound state approach for fiscally committing to cover their expensive care (room, board, and sometimes treatment costs). I believe central to the debate about funding has become which system is the best system to deal with the challenges multi-system youth present. Unfortunately, this creates an artificial fight over the very resources these kids need. We often hear that this youth is not my youth. Instead, these kids should be everyone's kids, everyone's responsibility, and everyone's focus.

The tragedy of custody relinquishment is one that exists on multiple planes. The idea that multi-system youth are one-dimensional or are only those kids for whom their parents are highly engaged but do not have the fiscal resources to care for their needs is but one side of this story. Yes, those kids exist and yes, their entry into the children services system is tragic and unnecessary. BUT these are not the only kids with multi-system needs in Ohio.



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Some quick facts from Richland County:

- In 2018 alone, Richland County Children Services cared for 166 kids at some time during the year; their placements costs totaled over \$1.7 million.
- Of this number, we gained custody of 136 kids to protect them from harm.
- The other 30 youth came into our custody for reasons other than abuse and neglect and at least some could potentially be served by other systems.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Subcommittee to maintain all the proposed investments in HB 166 for Ohio's public children services agencies. These resources are needed to meet the needs of children, their families, and our children services agencies. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions now or when the panel concludes.



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Ohio House of Representatives
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
House Finance
Testimony on HB166
April 10, 2019
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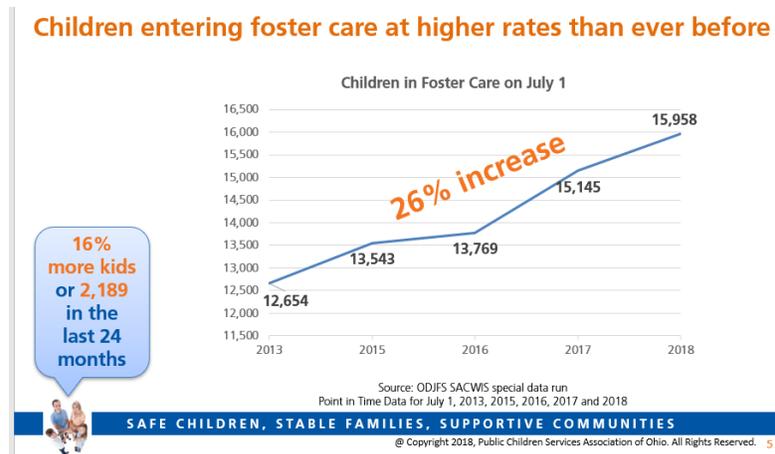
Good morning Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this children services panel testimony on HB 166. My name is Angela Sausser and I am the Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's 88 county Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for and promotes child protection program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

The previous panelists highlighted the various needs and pressure points facing Ohio's children services system. We are the system of last resort. We are the system negatively impacted every time another system reforms. A system that is significantly impacted by Ohio's addiction epidemic. And we are in SEVERE crisis today.

Two years ago, we stood before you and shared that Ohio's children services system was facing a crisis due to the opioid epidemic. At that time, our PCSAs had experienced an 11% increase of children in custody (13,719 children) compared to 2013; more children were staying in care longer; more reliance on kinship caregivers; and a 20% increase in placement costs (\$339.6M). The General Assembly then, led by many of you, especially Representatives Romanchuk and LaTourette became champions of our children services system by investing \$15M/year more

into the State Child Protection Allocation (Line 600523), after we had been flat funded for over a decade prior, even while the opioid epidemic grew and tore apart families.

Forward to today, we now have 26% more children in foster care today than five years ago-- almost 3,500 more children. On any given day, Ohio now has over 15,500 children in out-of-home care.



While volume alone puts Ohio's Children Services System in severe crisis, these children are coming into care with more complex needs - making it extremely difficult to find appropriate treatment and placement options, whether it would be a foster home, group home, or a residential treatment facility. Unfortunately, we do not have enough foster homes to meet these complex needs. Ohio has 7,400 licensed homes to care for the 15,500 children in care today; a definite shortage and strain on our system.

Sixty-one percent of children that are in custody of PCSAs and require an out-of-home placement are there for other reasons than abuse and neglect. These are the youth who have multiple-system needs (behavior, delinquency, dependency) in the custody of PCSAs. Our member agencies, the PCSAs, have shared stories of calling numerous places in order to find a home for a child who has entered foster care; of children sleeping in their agency's lobby for a night or several nights before a placement is found; of having to send a child out of state for a placement as no one was able to care for the child's needs in this state.

Attached to our testimony is a document titled, *“Stories from the Field: The Need for Reform.”* These are real stories about real children in our system and the struggles the PCSAs encounter when trying to secure appropriate placements for these children. Please take some time when you have a quiet moment to read and ponder these stories.

Majority of youth in custody are there for reasons other than abuse and neglect

Reports Screened-in to PCSAs

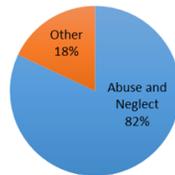


Figure 1: SFY 2018

Reason for Children In PCSA Custody

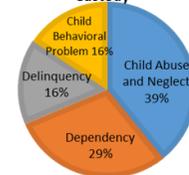


Figure 2: For children in custody on 7/1/18



SAFE CHILDREN, STABLE FAMILIES, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

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With more children in care with more complex needs, placement costs are rising rapidly. Placement costs equate to the room and board in a foster home, group home, or residential treatment facility for children in custody. Over the past 5 years, these placement costs have risen by 40%; between 2016 and 2018, annual placement costs increased by \$54M, totaling \$384.3M in SFY 18. PCSAs incur 63% of that cost—the balance is covered by federal funding. This is not sustainable for any county in Ohio.

Placement costs have increased sharply



Source: PCSAO Factbook 14th Edition Analysis



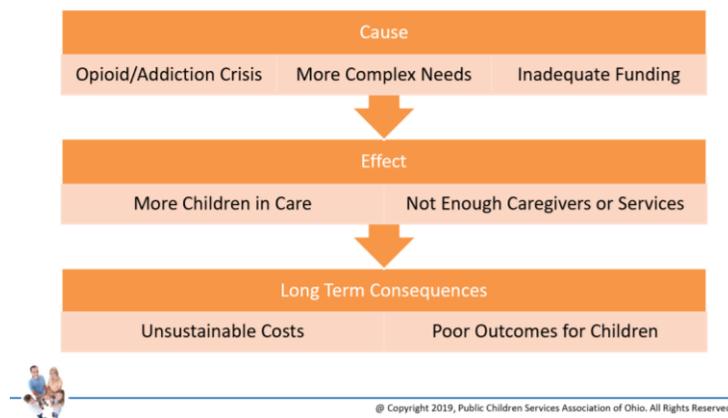
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Let's not forget the children services workforce that is overburdened and significantly traumatized. In fact, a recent study showed that over half of children services caseworkers demonstrated elevated levels of secondary trauma stress that meet PTSD thresholds.

More children in care, with more complex needs, higher placement costs, and an overburdened workforce leads to poor outcomes for children and families. Ohio's children services system needs **significant state investment and reform immediately.**

A System in Severe Crisis



Our directors of the county Public Children Services Agencies called for such reform last year – focused on building a stronger continuum of services for children. The goal of the reform-- which will take several budget cycles to achieve -- is to focus on keeping children with families. Reform will help prevent children from entering foster care, strengthen the foster care system to meet the complex needs of these children and youth, provide aftercare services to families so children don't re-enter foster care, and reduce reliance on residential treatment. It aligns with the new federal law, Family First Prevention Services Act, which when it becomes live in Ohio, will help our state build this stronger continuum of care for children.

Dedicated funding and leadership at the state and local levels are needed to achieve this reform. The Governor's proposed budget is right on target to help stabilize today's severe crisis in children services and begin the reform so desperately needed. And most importantly, to achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

HB 166 investments that connect to the children services crisis and our reform include:

- \$30M/year – added to the State Child Protection Allocation (JFS Line 600523), direct funding to county PCSAs to assist with the severe crisis and begin to stabilize (increase from \$60M to \$90M/year). This includes moving the \$10M incentive funding into the State Child Protection Allocation, which we support, and doubles the state’s historic investment of \$45M/year
- \$5M/year – for county PCSAs to hire staff to recruit foster families and provide supports to retain foster families, added to the State Child Protection Allocation (JFS Line 600523)
- \$25M/year – to assist PCSAs with the expensive and rising placement costs for youth with multiple system needs in custody or at risk of custody (JFS Line 600523)
- \$4.6M/year – to support evidence-based practices that achieve results of preventing children from entering care and reducing the length of stay in foster care, including Ohio START, 30 Days to Family, and Permanency Roundtables (JFS Line 600523)
- \$6M/year – to support continuing and expanding Ohio START program from 32 counties today to 64 counties by the end of the biennium (MHAS Line 336421)
- \$3.5M/year – to establish a robust statewide kinship navigator program (JFS Line 600523), will draw down \$3.5M in federal matching funds
- \$15M/year – maintain the current kinship caregiver program (JFS TANF earmark)
- \$3.4M/year to support technology needs for caseworkers to be more productive in the field (JFS Line 600450)

Other proposed investments in HB 166 that connect with children and families involved or at risk of being involved with children services and support the PCSAO Continuum of Care Reform plan include:

- \$6M/year in the OhioMHAS budget for crisis services. These are needed to prevent children from coming into foster care or reentering care.
- \$7.5M/biennium in the OhioMHAS budget to expand up to 30 specialized court dockets. Often families involved in these specialized dockets include children in foster care or at

risk of entering foster care. These programs help children remain at home or return home sooner.

- \$10M/year in the Dept. of Medicaid budget for multi-system youth innovations. These are services not covered today by Medicaid but would put them on the pathway for coverage and future expansion across the state. These services would prevent multi-system youth from having to enter custody of PCSAs for services.
- Behavioral Health Care Coordination in the Medicaid's budget – first time ever that the Dept. of Medicaid will develop a separate model for children which is desperately needed. This effort will create intensive care coordination models that specialize in multi-system youth and assist in preventing custody relinquishment.
- \$550M/biennium in the Dept. of Education budget for student wellness and success funds. A target population for these new wraparound services will be youth involved with the children services system. These services would assist in meeting needs of children in the schools and thus, lessen the need for children services involvement.
- \$83M/biennium in the Dept. of Health budget for increasing Help Me Grow home visits. These evidence-based home visit programs assist families to safely maintain children at home, promote child development, and prepare children for school.

We are on the right path. We respectfully request that the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services maintain these very needed investments in children services and investments in other areas of the budget that can support Ohio's efforts to build a stronger continuum of services for children. This is the first budget in at least two decades where solutions for children and their families are built across multiple department budgets, which translates to a multi-system approach to meeting the complex needs of children and families.

Thank you. I, along with our panel members, would be happy to answer any questions.



STORIES FROM THE FIELD: THE NEED FOR REFORM

The children in these narratives are real; their stories come from the accounts of children services agency directors throughout Ohio.

We share these stories for several reasons. First, to illustrate the severe crisis facing Ohio's children services system and the need for reform. Second, to put the focus where it should be - on the children. As you read, think of the children in your own life. These children are also "our" children. We must do better for **all** children.

Public Children Services Association of
Ohio
2019

Separating a Mother and Son

A lack of services available to infants and children with medical needs can prolong their stay in institutions.

In 2018, a 1-year-old child from Eastern Ohio, who had been in and out of the hospital since birth, came into the care of children services. The child had significant medical needs and was moved back and forth from the hospital to a long-term care facility out of state. After finally being moved back to the hospital, he was cleared for discharge on the condition of receiving in-home pediatric nursing and shifting the responsibility of care to the county agency. However, the county could not provide this service due to a lack of pediatric nurses in the community, making discharge impossible.



Healthcare providers requested that the county take custody and instead place the baby in a different county with the in-home pediatric services needed. However, the mother had custodial rights and wanted the child to come home.

The county would have to assume custody through no fault of the mother's but, rather, because the area lacked appropriate services. This mother was faced with the possibility that the only way her son could receive proper health treatment was to give up custody and remain separated from him.

UNSUSTAINABLE COSTS

By the Numbers...

\$384 Million: Total placement costs (room and board) for children and youth in custody in SFY2018; up \$54M /year in just two years. Complex needs and longer stays, as demonstrated by Northwest Ohio examples, show why these costs are increasing:



Youth 1, eligible for partial federal reimbursement (Title IV-E)

Days in a residential facility: **2,540**

Placement Cost: **\$435/day**

Total Placement Cost: **\$1.1 Million**

Local Share: **\$420,000**

Youth 2, Not eligible for partial federal reimbursement (Title IV-E)

Days in a residential facility: **1,101**

Placement Cost: **\$380/day**

Total Placement Cost: **\$438,380**

Local Share: **\$438,380**

Another Example:

3 youth in an Eastern Ohio county account for **75%** of the county's total placement costs



How do you Find a Home for a Boy with a Troubled Past?

Finding a foster home for a child with multiple needs and a challenging history often proves difficult.

One county in Northern Ohio searched far and wide for over a year trying to find a family facility for a 12-year-old boy in permanent custody who was ready to step down from a residential setting. He is developmentally delayed and has a background of familial substance abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness. Previously placed in therapeutic foster care, he was removed after he behaved violently with family, pets, and property, and exposed himself to another child.

More than 30 placement agencies were contacted, and the county's Board of Developmental Disabilities and Family and Children First Council became involved as well. Three families expressed interest in placement over the year, but they changed their minds after meeting him. The potential families expressed concerns specifically regarding his developmental delays and sexual behaviors.



For over a year now, this boy has been rejected from every placement the agency contacted. Being able to step down into a family setting is the next step in this boy's healing; instead he remains at the residential facility. Children should be raised in families, not institutions.

What Happens to the Boy Nobody Can Care for?



A 16-year-old boy from Northeast Ohio, currently in a therapeutic foster care placement after moving from placement to placement, is now being told he is no longer allowed to stay there.

While in the custody of his parents, he was sexually assaulted by an aunt when he was very young. He has an IQ of 67, struggles with reading and writing and is on IEP/ETP to help him in school. Moreover, he struggles with coping mechanisms, impulse control issues, and has allegations against him of non-consensual sexualized behaviors, but has not been formally charged. He has been aggressive with staff and peers in his placements, usually when he hears something that he does not like.

This child has current diagnoses of Primary-ADHD, Secondary-Adjustment Disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood, and Tertiary-PTSD. He has experienced extreme trauma in his life, and no placement suitable for his needs can be found.

A Teenager with no Place to Go

Challenges of placing adolescents with history of substance abuse and behavioral issues

Life as a teenager is already a difficult time for many 17-year-olds. This time is typically spent looking into what college you want to attend, playing sports, joining extracurriculars, or just enjoying your senior year of high school. However, for this 17-year-old from rural Southwest Ohio, none of that is a reality.

With a history of delinquency, aggressive behavior, and substance abuse, this girl is currently being held in a detention center. She has started a “riot” in a previous placement, organized other disruptions, and has run away several times. She faced a felony charge, but it was later dropped, taking the Department of Youth Services out of the picture. Despite best efforts, no placement was found as of one week before her release.

Every place that was contacted was unable to place her. However, the release from detention would occur regardless of whether the PCSA could find a place willing to accept her or not. This girl does not have a permanent home and has nowhere to stay after being released from detention; she is only 17 years old.



A Child Who has been Through It All

Challenges of finding an appropriate fit for youth with a combination of behavioral issues, juvenile detention background, and mental health needs cross state lines.

In 2013, a PCSA received custody of a 13-year-old boy. While in agency custody, he was placed in six different facilities (including group homes and residential centers), had 10 detention stays, and nine hospitalizations. The boy had several different psychiatric diagnoses, injured himself repeatedly, and demonstrated impulsive behavior.

He was asked to be removed from each facility, one as soon as 11 days after placement. In 2016, he was placed in a Juvenile Detention Center due to delinquency charges. Here, he attempted suicide. The county JFS contacted 129 different placement facilities in Ohio and other states, but none accepted placement. In 2016, a center in Missouri agreed to accept him. However, the boy's father in Florida was awarded custody in July after an evidentiary hearing following a home study denial, and he moved to Florida instead. Soon after, the boy was physically aggressive with his father, even breaking his arm, and was then placed in a treatment facility in Florida, starting the cycle again.



Children Services Workers Aren't Equipped to Serve as Mental Health Professionals



A county agency is seeking placement for a 14-year-old female from Southwest Ohio who was diagnosed with Unspecified Schizophrenia Related Psychotic Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intermittent Explosive Disorder, Intellectual Disability, and Opposition Defiant Disorder. There is discrepancy on her IQ, with one provider putting it at 66, another at 44. She experiences intense auditory and visual hallucinations and can be extremely aggressive. However, she can also be very sweet; she loves coloring, playing Uno, and listening to music.

She has been in multiple residential treatment settings over the years and is currently placed out of state. After continuing to exhaust the list of resources, the agency has run out of ideas for where to place this girl, and where to get her help.

The teenager's future is uncertain because the care she needs is unavailable.

Continued Challenges Finding Facilities

There are immense difficulties placing youth with high levels of psychiatric need, behavioral concerns, and many previous placements.

In 2018, a Northern Ohio county was suddenly tasked with finding a placement for an 11-year-old boy. This child had most recently been at a treatment facility that closed, leaving him without a placement. Before he arrived there, he had moved among seven different families and facilities, where several placements reported instances of unsafe behavior and sexual aggression. Before his most recent placement closed, however, he was reported to be improving, demonstrating less sexualized behavior and attending school. After the facility closed, the county contacted at least 55 places. None were able to provide placement for him - citing reasons including being full, concerns for safety of other children in their care due to his sexualized behaviors, his history of placement disruptions, and unable to provide the appropriate restrictions and care given his mental health challenges.



Even though this boy was showing improvement in his behaviors, an appropriate placement that could support his progress could not be found.

Help us help a system in crisis. Foster hope for Ohio's children.



THEY AREN'T THE ONLY ONES

Unfortunately, these children are not an exception to a rule. Provider agencies are unable to accept placement of a child for a variety of reasons, including no availability in a foster home or treatment facility, or their services do not align with the child's needs - demonstrating clearly why reform is needed. Below are just some denials that have been received:

- "We are full at this time. Thank you for considering our treatment team for placement. We look forward to working with you in the future."
- "I'm sorry, but due to his behaviors, we do not have a foster home available for him. I hope you can find a home for him soon."
- "Unfortunately, after the clinical team reviewed the backgrounds, they are going to decline him due to the mental health component."
- "Thank you for the referral of this youth. We have reviewed the information that you supplied. We do not feel that he would be a good fit for the Residential Program at this time. We look forward to reviewing future referrals."

Why Is Reform Needed in Ohio?

With 4,000 additional children in foster care today than just five years ago, Ohio's children services system is in crisis. They come with more trauma and more complex needs, and they stay in care longer. If trends continue, by 2020, Ohio could have 20,000 children in foster care on any given day and spend more than half a billion dollars just for out-of-home placement. Ohio can—and must—do better. PCSAO is proposing system-wide reform that will create a continuum of services for children and their families. We can get better outcomes and, ultimately, spend less.

Opioid Epidemic Devastation



Ohio is one of the worst-hit states in the nation for overdoses, and these adults are of child-bearing age. More kids are coming into foster care due in large part to the epidemic.

- 27% increase in number of children in care since 2013
- More than 16,000 children in custody on any given day in July 2018
- 20% increase in placement costs alone (\$55 million increase)
- 7,200 licensed foster homes unable to meet the demand
- Average child spends a month longer in care because of parent relapse

Ohio's biggest challenges:

- Kids are unhealthy, unable to overcome their trauma
- Kids are being raised in institutions, not with families
- Kids are being placed with foster families that are not near their home
- Kids are being placed out of state for residential care
- Kids are staying in care longer

Workforce Impacts



Children services caseworkers strive for reunification, but as caseloads rise and children get stuck in foster care, caseworker morale plunges.

- In 2016 and 2017, 1 in 4 caseworkers left their positions
- Cost of turnover estimated at \$24.3 million
- Research shows that caseworker turnover has a direct impact on kids spending longer in foster care

Residential Care for Complex Needs



Many children in residential (congregate) care settings came into the system not because of abuse or neglect but because other systems—juvenile justice, mental health, developmental disabilities—are unable to meet their complex needs.

- 14% increase in residential and 7% increase in group home placements since 2014
- Children in out-of-state residential placement stay in custody for 559 days (median) vs. 318 days for in-state
- 15% of children in congregate care are under the age of 13

Funding Inequities



Even with a 2017 increase from the state legislature, Ohio pays the smallest share of child protection costs of any state in the nation.

- Ohio contributes only 10 cents on the dollar, and just 5 cents of that goes to counties (SFY16)
- Counties bear the lion's share, 52 cents on the dollar; federal government share is 38 cents (SFY16)
- \$175 million more will be needed by 2020 just for out-of-home placement costs

Children's Continuum of Care Reform

Children deserve to be safe in their homes, and they do better living with families than in institutions. Ohio can do a better job of preventing children from entering foster care in the first place with community-based, short-term crisis stabilization services. If children have to be removed from their families, we need a robust foster care system that can support the challenging needs of kids in a family-based setting while focusing on reunification. Join PCSAO and our supporters in redesigning Ohio's children services and foster care system using these four strategies to keep kids safe, stable and healthy.



Prevention, Intervention, Crisis & Diversion Services

Increase services so that children can remain with their families and not come into foster care in the first place

- High-Fidelity Wraparound
- Intensive Home-Based Treatment
- Trauma-informed short-term crisis options
- Juvenile court diversion programs
- Community-based supports to meet basic needs
- Peer mentors
- Family search and engagement
- Evidence-based mental health, substance abuse and parenting education programs

This plan is designed to reduce:

- Number of children entering foster care
- Length of stay in foster care
- Reentry into foster care
- Residential placement
- Children experiencing trauma
- Cost to taxpayers



Appropriate Residential Care

Decrease Ohio's use of congregate care (residential, group homes) settings and, when needed, ensure that high-quality residential treatment facilities can meet the needs of children and are available in proximity of family

- Available, affordable and accessible high-acuity placements
- Short-term, individualized, trauma-informed facilities
- Expanded options



Professional Foster Care

Create a robust foster care system that can meet the variety of challenging needs of children while focusing on reunification efforts

- Targeted caregiver recruitment
- Foster and kinship family retention supports
- In-home treatment services
- Defined expectations with aligned supports, policies and compensation
- Value-based incentives



Aftercare & Reunification Services

Increase availability and accessibility of services so that children can safely return to their families and achieve sustained permanency

- Meaningful supports for families
- Various levels of care accessible to all counties