

TUSCARAWAS COUNTY CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



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Testimony of Traci Berry, Esq.
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HB166

Thank you Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Traci Berry and I am the Director of the Tuscarawas County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) and the 2019 President of the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association (OCDA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on child support local funding in HB166.

You just heard Amy Roehrenbeck testify that counties are facing obstacles in serving our families. In Tuscarawas County our CSEA serves over 24,000 men, women, and children. We have done so with shrinking resources since 2005. By 2012 I was forced to lay off one-third of my staff. We have survived by being innovative and frugal and we remain determined to make a difference in the lives of the children in our program. As the Governor said, a child has but one chance to grow up.

Tuscarawas County has changed its approach over the years to make an 18+ year relationship with our families less intimidating and more customer-friendly from our first contact. We greet new parents personally, arm them with the information and knowledge necessary to navigate

the child support system and make the best decisions for their unique situations. We've been recognized across the state for our approach. It's our people who have made this approach work, because they are parents, too.

But we are at a crossroads. We have a digital filing system that's more microfiche than user-friendly. We are taking advantage of the Enterprise Document Management System (EDMS), but in order to do so I was forced to choose between replacing a retiring employee or EDMS. EDMS will not do her job. Her job is to conduct support order modifications and explain that process to families. It's something that cannot be automated. Yet the statewide document management system will enable our employees to keep track of the necessary paperwork in a more effective and efficient manner. Our copiers and scanners are too old to talk to the new system so they must be replaced. We need more outreach to the public, the private bar and the courts, but do not have the personnel to further these key relationships. We want to take advantage of simple things such as text message reminders of hearings, but we cannot afford the software.

Tuscarawas County was one of the counties who lost funding with the change in the allocation methodology for state dollars. We lost 24% of our funding; funding necessary to serve our families. Counties across Ohio are forced to choose between customer service and upgrading equipment, technology advancement and staffing levels necessary to do the work our families need. If our program isn't appropriately funded, we will fail our children. Paternity will not be established, support will not be collected, and back support will go unpaid. Help us prevent this crisis. Child Support is key to over one million children in Ohio. Please support our request for \$3 million dollars in state funding to harness an additional 6 million in federal funding. We believe Ohio cannot have a budget focused on children and families without adequately funding the child support program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.