



Community and Family Advancement Committee

November 29, 2017

Proponent Testimony of Rob Pierson

Deputy Director of Child Support, Stark County Job and Family Services

HB 366

Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Community and Family Advancement House Committee, my name is Rob Pierson. I am the Deputy Director of Child Support for Stark County Job and Family Services. I have been in the Child Support Program for 34 years, working in 3 different counties and the State Office of Child Support. I have been over the Child Support agency in Stark County since March of 2006.

Ohio's Child Support Guidelines are more than past due to being revised and modernized to reflect family life in 2017. It has been 25 years since the current guidelines and tables have last been revised. Just as the world has changed dramatically in a quarter of a century, so has the cost of raising children and the tools needed by the Child Support Program of the 21st century to ensure parents financially and emotionally support their children.

HB 366's changes to Ohio's Child Support Guidelines will help families be more secure financially, encourage the emotional support of children, and will create a set of guidelines that will increase the effectiveness of Ohio's Child Support Program. The proposed guidelines help families who rely on child support payments to be more secure financially at both ends of the economic spectrum, as well as in middle.

The new tables will allow courts and agencies to issue realistic orders with updated tables that reflect the cost in 2017 to raise a child rather than in 1992.

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We only have to compare the cost of shoes, clothing, milk, eggs and rent in 1992 to the cost of these same items in 2017 to know the current guidelines' tables are outdated.

The updated tables in HB 366 also include a self-sufficiency reserve which focuses on the ability to pay support for those non-custodial parents who are low income or living in poverty themselves. If we are ever going to be able to encourage low income non-custodial parents to work, stay engaged in their child's life, and pay their child support, a self-sufficiency reserve for low income non-custodial parents that works is required. Currently low income non-custodial parents avoid Child Support agencies and often flee to the underground economy to ensure they have sufficient funds to pay their rent, buy food, and pay transportation costs to get to work.

The self-sufficiency reserve in HB 366 encourages non-custodial parents to work, report that work to the Child Support agency, and pay a fair child support amount based on their income and the cost for them to survive. If we can get this group of low-income non-custodial parents to stay engaged with the system, and get into the routine of paying consistent, dependable child support payments, the child and the custodial parent will significantly benefit in the long term.

The self-sufficiency reserve has a graduated adjustment, which is reduced and eventually phased out as the non-custodial parent's income increases. A guidelines bill that recognizes the needs of those in poverty who are part of the "working poor" encourages non-custodial parents to stay employed at one place. Only then will they have the ability to increase their wages through promotions and longevity. This often never happens when a non-custodial parent "job hops" to avoid enforcement by the Child Support agency.

The changes HB 366 makes relating to the self-sufficiency reserve will also strengthen Stark County's efforts to change the direction of the Child Support Program through federal grants we have received. The programs we have implemented work in a positive way with non-custodial parents in poverty who have barriers to employment.

Today's Child Support Program clearly recognizes the importance of having the non-custodial parent be part of their child's daily life, and playing an active,

positive role in raising the child. Research overwhelmingly shows the benefits of having two parents actively involved in a child's life, including when the parents are no longer together. When I began in the Child Support Program in 1983 we did not recognize non-custodial parents as a father or mother, we unfortunately saw them only as a paycheck.

Decades of research shows that line of thinking does not benefit the child or our communities. We need both parents in the picture, and this guidelines bill further encourages this need through HB 366's parenting time adjustment component. Non-custodial parents with a standard parenting time order will have his/her support obligation reduced by ten percent to allow the parent the ability to keep some funds in his/her home for expenses while the child is with them. Our society desperately needs both parents to be there for their children, financially and emotionally supporting a child are equally important. The parenting time adjustment provision recognizes that critical need.

Another very positive part of HB 366 is the component of the bill to move the tables from the Revised Code statutes to the Administrative Code rules. The tables can then be regularly updated to include changes in the cost of living, consistent with the Consumer Price Index. This will help ensure that Ohio's children will not have to wait another 25 years for the guidelines' tables to be changed to reflect the cost of raising a child in 2022 or 2027.

I see the enactment of the Child Support Guidelines contained in this bill as a victory for mothers, fathers, and most important of all, for Ohio's children. Therefore, I strongly urge you to support HB 366.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.