

Testimony in Opposition to HB 366

Chair Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding this important piece of legislation. My name is Graham Bowman. I am an attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Legal Aid Family Law Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of domestic relations attorneys from each of the Ohio's eight Legal Aid programs. Collectively, these organizations provide free legal assistance to Ohioans with low income, and limited savings and assets, in a variety of civil legal matters. Members of the Task Force represent clients primarily on family law matters, including domestic violence, custody, divorces, and child support.

Members of the legal aid community as well as the Ohio Poverty Law Center have already testified regarding our concerns about how this legislation will impact children and the obligee's household and so I will keep my comments brief.

First, I would like to re-iterate that the Ohio Poverty Law Center and the legal aid community support the vast majority of this legislation and believe it is imperative that we update the child support guidelines. Twenty-five years is too long of a time to wait before fixing issues with a program as critical to the support of Ohio's children as Child Support.

At the end of the day, the legal aid community shares the same goals as the proponents of this bill: consistent regular payments to support children. This bill is a careful and thoughtful piece of legislation attempting to solve a problem for which there are no easy answers—too many obligors cannot afford their share of the cost of raising a child. Our primary concern is not the overall legislation but rather the degree to which it reduces support orders as a means to address the status quo, which we agree is not working.

Self-Sufficiency Reserve Formula

The formula being locked in statute that calculates the amount by which orders will be reduced is designed to provide the maximum financial incentive possible to obligors who are currently not paying in full. There is no magic number for how much of a financial incentive should be provided. It is ultimately a public policy decision. Members of the legal aid community who represent a large number of obligees suspect based on years of experience working closely with recipients that poor compliance rates will continue despite an increased financial incentive to comply. As you heard last week, distrust of systems, unemployment, and other complex social factors all lead to lack of compliance in addition to financial considerations. We agree that current orders are unrealistic and that an expanded self-sufficiency reserve is necessary to protect obligors' ability to care for themselves so that they can support their children in turn. We are only seeking a more moderate reduction in current orders out of concern for those low-income families that are currently receiving their full support.

Conclusion

As this important legislation moves forward we look forward to continuing to work with proponents of this legislation and members of this committee to monitor its effects and find ways to strengthen job opportunities and incomes for low-wage workers so they are able to afford the full cost of raising their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am available to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

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