

Ohio Senate
Finance Committee

March 11, 2015

Interested Party Testimony on Sub. HB 64

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Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 64.

Formed in 1973, the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) is a statewide association of child and family service providers that are united together to develop the best care possible for Ohio's children and families. Our member agencies serve the thousands of Ohio children and families involved in the child welfare, behavioral health, and juvenile justice systems. These services include foster care and adoption, counseling, residential treatment and group home care, independent living, and specialized school services.

We are pleased that the General Assembly and Governor Kasich's Administration are actively exploring strategies to improve outcomes of our state's foster youth who 'age out' of the foster care system when they reach age 18. We ask that this committee advance these efforts by adding all provisions of HB 50 into HB 64.

HB 50 was introduced in February by State Representatives Dorothy Pelanda and Cheryl Grossman and thirteen of their colleagues from both parties. The bill improves guardianship law and creates a new statewide program to support young adults who 'age out' of foster care through their 21st birthday.

The bill is necessary because it will make immense strides to fix a problem that plagues our state. On any given day, there are approximately 12,000 children in custody of child protective services who are living in foster care. Most are reunited with their families or adopted by new families. Sadly, approximately 1,000 of these foster youth linger in the system, and upon reaching age 18, 'age

out' of agency custody each year, and are left to navigate the real-world with little or no supports. What happens next to these youth is devastating.

Data from 2013 of young adults in Ohio who "aged out" of foster care reveals:

- 26 percent experienced homelessness
- 36 percent experienced incarceration in jail or prison
- 53 percent had not completed high school or received a GED
- 12 percent worked full time

Source: ODJFS, National Youth in Transition Database

By supporting these youth with smart case management and appropriate transitional housing services, we can reverse these outcomes, and ultimately provide a net cost-benefit to Ohio taxpayers (which was determined through independent research by The Ohio State University). If passed into law, Ohio will become the 27th state to start implementation of this federally-funded program.

On behalf of our association, and the statewide coalition called **Ohio Fostering Connections**, we strongly urge the Finance Committee to consider including HB 50 in the omnibus amendment for HB 64.

HB 50 cleared the House Community and Family Advancement Committee in April and, as the bill includes an appropriation, it was referred to and cleared the House Finance Committee in May. The bill is expected to be passed out of the House next week.

HB 50 is the product of a giant stakeholder process that started eighteen months ago. Hundreds of organizations and individuals contributed to the bill, including juvenile court judges, county children services agencies, ODJFS, the Attorney General's office, foster care and supportive housing providers, foster youth and alumni, and many others. Forty-five Ohio organizations endorse it, including Nationwide Children's Hospital, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, and the Junior Leagues. Online, over 6,000 individuals have signed a petition urging Ohio lawmakers to pass the bill. Multiple newspapers called for its passage, including the Columbus Dispatch, Cleveland Plain Dealer, and Toledo Blade. Attorney General DeWine has called for its passage. And most importantly, foster youth and alumni themselves testified before the House about the bill's importance, and dozens of others met directly with state lawmakers, including members of this committee.

HB 50 includes appropriations to ODJFS: \$550,000 GRF in SFY 16 for planning, and \$9,670,804 GRF in SFY 17 for the program's first year of implementation. The

state appropriation in SFY 17 would draw down an additional \$14,830,972 of federal dollars into our state.

While there is a cost for the program's operations, it has been determined that major state GRF savings are possible and achievable in the relatively near term. The most costly outcomes -- the ones that hurt young people the most -- come as a result of events, decisions, and behaviors that occur within a few years or even days of aging out of foster care, like becoming homeless, committing theft, or dropping out of school. For many, the challenges that start during the 18 - 21 age range continue throughout the rest of their lives.

While Ohio foster youth who "age out" face daunting odds, they deserve our support and a serious investment in their future. The most costly solution available is to simply do nothing, or to do too little, too late. Just like all kids, teenagers in foster care deserve access to positive education and work experiences, and the opportunity to make decisions about their own lives.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF DOING IT

RIGHT

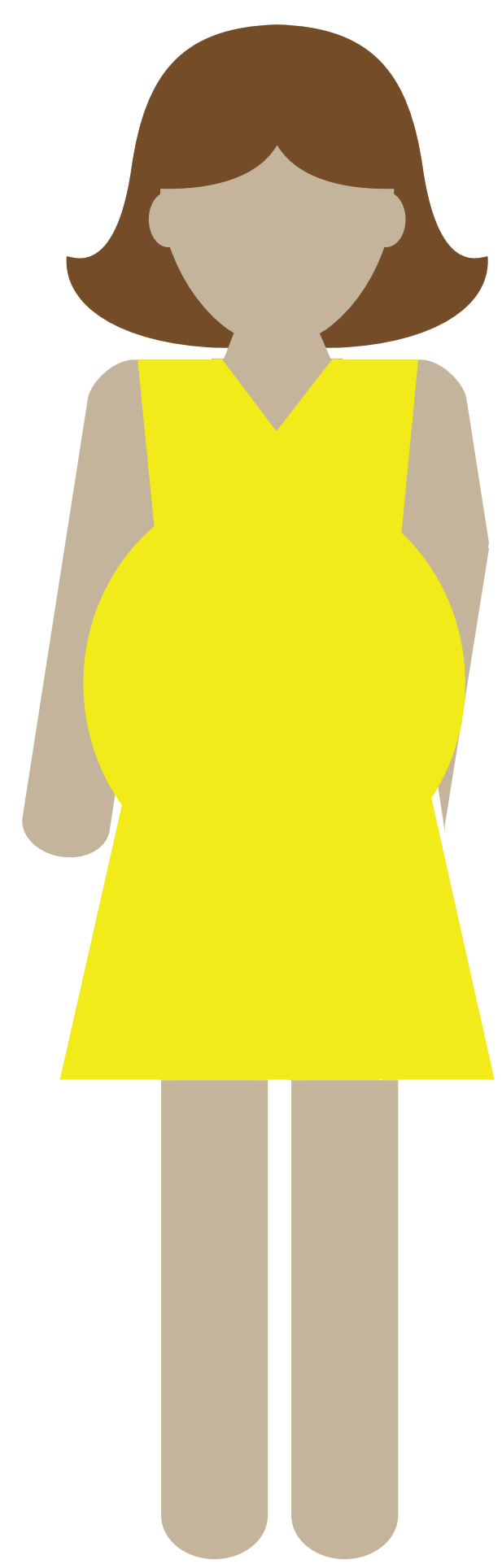
By extending supports for foster youth through age 21, we will all see the benefits through:



young people completing high school, vocational training, and college



people employed



unplanned pregnancies



young people connected to caring families, helpful adults, and support networks



incarcerations



healthcare costs



#ohioreadset21



Ohio Fostering Connections

Supporting Ohio Foster Youth Through Age 21

OhioFosteringConnections.org

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

SOBERING

STATISTICS

#ohioreadys21

OHIO FOSTER YOUTH OUTCOMES AT AGE 19

14%



HAD A CHILD

24%

WORKED
PART TIME

26%

experienced
homelessness
within the last
two years

12%

WORKED
FULL TIME



53%



HAD NOT COMPLETED
HIGH SCHOOL OR
RECEIVED A GED



36%

EXPERIENCED
INCARCERATION

source: ODJFS 2014



Ohio Fostering Connections

Supporting Ohio Foster Youth Through Age 21

OhioFosteringConnections.org

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The Ohio House has a chance to protect the state's most vulnerable residents — seniors who are ill and dependent, and youngsters who have been abused or orphaned — by passing an important bill before heading off for summer vacation.

House Bill 50 is a digest of common sense, fiscal prudence and compassion.

The bill provides a guiding hand to children who age out of the foster-care system, making youth who enter job or educational programs eligible for financial assistance and mentoring.

Most children aren't ready to be on their own at age 18. According to 2013 data, 1 in 4 became homeless; 1 in 2 didn't have a high-school diploma or GED; 1 in 7 became pregnant; and 1 in 3 went to jail or prison.

The program this legislation establishes would cost money — nearly \$35 million a year when fully ramped up by 2020. But \$14 million in state spending would leverage \$21 million in federal dollars.

This is money well-spent: Proponents estimate that taxpayers would save close to \$2 for every \$1 invested.

The salvaged lives and reduced costs to society would be even greater.

“When a young person is just abandoned on their 18th birthday by the system, there can be tragic consequences ... These consequences affect Ohio as a whole and cost the system more dollars in the end,” Michelle Delery Stratman, counsel for The Buckeye Ranch, told a House committee.

The bill also aims to protect Ohio's seniors, who account for most of the 67,000 individuals controlled by court-appointed guardians. Reps. Cheryl Grossman, R-Grove City, and Dorothy Pelanda, R-Marysville, say this part of their bill is a direct result of horrific abuses by guardians that were uncovered by *The Dispatch* (to see stories, go to Dispatch.com/unguarded).

Until the Ohio Supreme Court enacted minimal standards this month, each of Ohio's 88 probate courts set their own rules for policing guardians. Some attorneys took advantage of lax oversight, creating a cottage industry with hundreds of wards whom they neglected and cheated.

The Dispatch found wards stripped of their assets and locked in a nursing home and drugged. Another woman, down to 84 pounds, was found crawling on her floor, where her negligent guardian left food.

The General Assembly quickly drafted a bill spelling out or a ward's “Bill of Rights.” But objections from Ohio ProLife Action, which feared wards could demand abortions, derailed that effort in December.

H.B. 50 resurrects this needed law, but contains language to exclude abortion services, even though most wards are elderly.

This Bill of Rights is desperately needed to spell out appropriate guidelines for the guardians as they make personal, financial and medical decisions for their wards.

Among the 15 rights are the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to have safe, sanitary and humane living conditions and to have explanations of medical procedures and treatments.

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"I firmly believe this is just a first step in protecting our voiceless and vulnerable in our society," Pelanda said.

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H.B. 50, which enjoyed overwhelming support in two House committees, needs a floor vote quickly so the Senate has time for hearings and passage yet this year.

The Ohio General Assembly should act to ensure humane, just treatment of young and old in guardianships.

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