TESTIMONY OF
PATRICK A. DONAVAN
REGARDING HB 126 - REGION BASED KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ADVANCEMENT
OF THE
OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MAY 17, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Ginter, Vice-Chair Conditt, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the Committee. My name is Patrick Donavan, and I am the Kinship Supervisor for Muskingum County Adult and Child Protective Services. I also sit on the Board of Directors for the "Ohio Grandparent-Kinship Coalition".   I am a past member of the "Ohio Department of Job and Family Services" Kinship Advisory Board. I have presented at the local, state, and national levels regarding kinship and its importance. Through my service in these capacities, I have had the opportunity to work with 1000's of Ohio's kinship families one-on-one. I have been in their homes, and sat next to them at court. As recently as Monday, I spoke with a child who is now 21 years old, pursuing college, and unfortunately calling me to report the abuse of her siblings.   Her grandmother raised her because her parents struggle with substance abuse. I have been able to assist kinship caregivers in multiple counties when their home county does not have a Kinship Navigator. These kinship family's lives take a 180 turn when they take in multiple children. Often times they have only minutes to make the decision that can affect them for many, many, years. Yet they still take on this full-time responsibility. They deal with the children's emotional crises from not being able to be with parents. They take on significant added expense from daycare, to food, to utilities, to beds and school fees. They also have to deal with the biological parents that are often their own children.

It has been my experience that the handful of counties that do have navigators, often can't stretch their resources across the State.   This results in countless kinship families not being able to take advantage of programs that already exist. This in turn, results in children being placed into foster care because the kinship caregivers are unable to navigate the system.

In Ohio, kinship caregivers provide safety and stability for over 200,000 of our children. In a medium sized county like Muskingum, that number is well over 1200. Without these caregivers, these children would be languishing in foster care. Our agency is experiencing involvement with increasing numbers of sibling groups, some as large as 9. Keeping siblings together in foster care is becoming increasingly difficult. These children are more comfortable with grandma or "aunt", and are ultimately more successful in life, and experience less trauma. It also maintains family and culture. Opioids are only making this reality even more imperative as Ohio's foster homes are currently being pushed to their limits.

I have served in every officer position with the "Ohio Grandparent-Kinship Coalition", and have been active with the Coalition since 2004. Over the last 13 years, you hear one common theme from caregivers and professionals--- There is an incredible need for navigators in every county. Budgetarily, this is not realistic. However, a regionalized kinship navigator system, would allow counties that don't have Kinship Navigators to have a point person that could guide them in the direction they need, to ensure that the children in their care, are provided for, and safe.

Muskingum County is part of "*Protect*Ohio" which is a Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project, which includes 15 counties. "*Protect*Ohio" has shown consistent success with supporting kinship caregivers since 1996. It clearly shows the benefits of kinship care. Counties that utilize the kinship strategy have less children in foster care than in comparison to control counties. In Muskingum County, and others, the Kinship Navigator program is the key concept behind our success in keeping children safe and out of foster care.

Thank you Chairman Ginter and Members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.