Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee
Testimony on House Bill 340
Joel Potts, Executive Director
Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association
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Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent on House Bill 340. My name is Joel Potts and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association which represents the 88 county departments of job and family service agencies.

We appreciate the efforts of Representative Young through House Bill 340 to address a significant issue in the administration of multiple job and family service programs at the local level. Improvements with information sharing would significantly improve our ability to service Ohioans, provide better comprehensive case management, ensure program integrity and help safeguard the health and wellbeing of our clients and workers.

County agencies administer one of the largest health, human service and workforce systems in the nation. One in four Ohioans depend on their local JFS system to help meet basic needs, including obtaining access to healthcare and food, improve job opportunities, collect child support, escape poverty and be safe.

County casework requires an astronomical amount of information gathering, documentation and verification. It is not uncommon for county job and family service agencies to administer over 100 different programs including child support, public assistance, child protection services and workforce. Each program includes its own bureaucracy and its own mainframe computer system to help administer their respective program.

In addition to the complexities, unique requirements and mandates of each program, county caseworkers must utilize multiple computer systems in order to provide services. Computer systems currently used by local caseworkers include:

- CRIS-E (Client Registry Information System – Enhanced) – SNAP and Ohio Works First Programs
- OBWP (Ohio Benefits Worker Portal, also known as Ohio Benefits) – Medicaid
- SETS (Support Enforcement Tracking System) – Child Support
- SACWIS (Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System) – Child Protection Services
- CCIDS (Child Care Information Data System) – Child Care
- OWCMS (Ohio Workforce Case Management System) – Workforce Development
- MITS (Medicaid Information Technology System) – Medicaid Provider System
- ODAPS (Ohio Data Base for Adult Protective Services) – Adult Protective Services
- CFIS (County Finance Information System) – Local fiscal information system

It is a regular occurrence for clients to be involved in multiple programs and to have information in many of these systems. It is equally common for caseworkers to need to access information for client services and need access to the information included in these systems. Unfortunately, in most cases the caseworker cannot utilize the computer at their desk to easily look up, verify or utilize the information available in our own systems. This lack of access creates major obstacles to the system, creates frustration to the client and worker alike, and delays services which could negatively affect services and result in improper payments.

For years counties have urged the state to make easier access to information through our computer systems. Regrettably, access is becoming a bigger problem for county workers as we develop new computer systems.

I need to stress that we are not requesting total access to each computer system. Nor are we requesting access to information which is not already available to us through paper processes or that is contrary to federal law. We also are not seeking a computer system upgrade or enhancements which would incur costs to develop. We are simply requesting "read only" access to information to make the system more efficient for everyone involved, and the capacity for such access already exists today.

The lack of access to information impacts the job and family service system in many ways. Improved access will address health and safety concerns for clients and workers, make the system more efficient, enhance federal funding and help us to address fraud.

Client confidentiality is of paramount importance to the county job and family service directors. Public trust in casework is a tremendous responsibility which we take very seriously. Safeguards are in place in all of our computer systems and operations. Caseworkers can and are disciplined for any misuse of information.

County directors already have the responsibility and discretion to determine the amount of access a caseworker has within a certain system. However, the director cannot decide which worker has initial access. This is currently a state level decision.

County job and family service agencies are entrusted with ALL the casework responsibilities and responsible for placing the information into the computer systems. We should also be allowed access to the information to do the job we are entrusted and expected to do.

I do not want to overly simplify the issue. There are many hurdles to overcome to make the system operate as smoothly and efficiently as everyone desires. Nevertheless, the concept of computer access to information is simple, allowable, doable and the right thing to do.

We look forward to working with the sponsor and the committee to further develop legislation which would put us in line with practices of other states and fully utilize our computer systems to reach their capacity to serve the residents of Ohio.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to speak as a proponent of House Bill 340. I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to working with you to finalize legislation which meets the needs of the citizens we serve.