

Senate Finance - Health and Medicaid Subcommittee

May 17, 2017

Testimony on Sub. HB49

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Good morning Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Tavares, and members of the Health and Medicaid Subcommittee.

My name is Tim Bubb. I am now serving in my 13<sup>th</sup> year as a Licking County Commissioner. I am a longtime resident of Newark and currently reside in Heath.

As a County budgeting official who is familiar with allocating scarce resources to address a variety of unmet needs and representing one of the 88 counties that are partners with the State in providing critical services, I stand before you today speaking for the abused and neglected children of Ohio who have precious few advocates for their situations.

As a County Commissioner I am speaking not only for the children, who through no fault of their own, are in dire circumstances with their futures placed in the hands of a county children services agency. I'm also speaking for our State's thin line of social workers, kinship family caregivers and foster parents who 'everyday' feel like they are swimming uphill against a tidal wave of human needs that has overwhelmed our resources and ability to cope.

This presentation from the county government perspective could easily become a numbers game, which I will avoid. I will limit this to five quick sets of numbers which make the point for Licking County and by extension the other 87 counties as well.

First - Over the past four years, approximately **75-percent** of the children entering our custody are directly related to the drug and mental health issues of their parents. Opiates in particular are driving more and more children into our custody. I could expand on this point, but it is not

necessary. There is not a person in this room who is not aware of family, friends or co-workers who have been directly impacted by the addiction crisis in Ohio.

Second - Licking County now has the highest number of children ever in custody- **442 kids** as of this month! Since January **of this year**, 108 of those children came into custody due to their parents' drug use. These children are the 'collateral' damage of the addiction tsunami that has hit our state.

Third - Placement costs, when kids cannot remain safely in their homes, are increasing. Those costs have exceeded **\$2.4 million** in first quarter of 2017 just in Licking County. We cannot NOT serve these children!

Fourth - Saving these children, who in many cases are abandoned by their addicted parents, is expensive. For Licking County the costs have run as high as **\$400 per day for one child**. Because of trauma, a growing number of kids require long-term costly services such as residential treatment.

Finally - Like other counties across the state, Licking County has stepped up. We have maintained a children services levy at 1 Mill since 1985. The current 10- year levy was replaced in 2015 and is valued at about \$3.9M per year; it actually collects about \$3.7M per year. It is not nearly enough!

**We entered 2017 projecting that we would have a \$675,000 deficit for foster care/treatment costs.** We now expect this to be much higher given the huge increase of kids who have already come through our doors since January.

Licking County has seen a **32-percent cut in state support** for children services since state fiscal year 2008. The recession forced the State to pull away from this financial commitment to the children who have suffered from abuse and neglect, and that support has not returned. These children cannot speak for themselves. We have to advocate for them and to a much greater extent stand up for them and their futures.

As a County, Licking has supplemented the levy with county general funds. \$1.45-million in 2014, \$2.2-million in 2015, \$2.78-million in 2016, and for 2017, we have initially budgeted \$2.8-million. **We will continue to do our part, but this is not sustainable.** We need the state to become a fuller partner in serving abused and neglected children.

Let me conclude by saying our County's experience is not unique. It is a problem for the metro counties with their huge numbers, for the suburban counties who are at the vortex of the new opiate crisis, and for the poor and rural counties of Ohio who simply have little tax base and few options.

I am not naive to the challenges you all face, trying to plug the huge holes in the budget that is now in your lap and with the interesting contradiction of declining State revenue in what is a stronger economy.

Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members, I would ask you to recognize the \$30-million ask for the abused and neglected children in the counties of Ohio. I also realize that only half of that has been achieved and the remainder will be a steep climb. Your counties and the thousands of vulnerable children in our care, who are the real victims of the addiction society, are asking you to do your best. The need is to save this next generation. They are our future!

Thank you – I am happy to answer any questions you may have.