



TO: Senate Health and Human Services Committee Members
FROM: Representative Ron Young
DATE: February 27, 2018
RE: Sponsor Testimony – Public Assistance Data Efficiency Initiative

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares, thank you for allowing me to offer sponsor testimony on Substitute HB340. My local County Commissioner, the Director of our Lake County Job and Family Services and the Director of Ohio Job and Family Services Directors Association presented this issue to me.

It has the support of the Ohio Job and Family Services Director’s Association, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio and the Ohio County Commissioner’s Association. There have been multiple interested parties meetings, conference calls, and conversations with all effected agencies and associations.

For over 20 years, Ohio’s public assistance computer systems have morphed into six separate “siloes” and databases including:

- Medicaid, (including Eligibility and M.I.T.S. Medical Information Technology System)
- Welfare system both Cash and Food Assistance
- Child Support
- Child Protective Services
- Child Welfare; Including Adoption and Foster placement
- Workforce Development

To one degree or another over time, they have progressively insulated and walled off the information from each other. This practice has led to significant inefficiencies, loss of taxpayer dollars, and frustration for government employees, their supervisors and even the clients, which they serve. Joel Potts, Executive Director of Ohio Job and Family Services Director’s Association has informed me he has been hearing for over 25 years (15 of which he spent working at JFS) that the state was about to overhaul and automate the system. However, during those years it has consistently grown more and more fragmented. It is time that the legislature takes action to correct what has become grossly inefficient.

For example, at this moment a Lake County JFS employee may be taking an application for food stamps from one of my constituents. After spending probably about 40 minutes or more providing the required information the client might rise and walk the required 5 feet across an open aisle between desks to file for the Medicaid Program. To the astonishment of the client and the embarrassment of the employee, another and perhaps even identical application must be completed requiring clients to provide once again name, addresses, phone numbers, SS numbers, work history, income, benefit program history, medical information, family background etc... The fact that this can happen multiple times at the same location and on the same day is absurd!

Making this scenario even more ridiculous is the fact that the employee taking the second application is usually sitting in front of a computer that already contains the very information the applicant has just provided to the other employee sitting just 5 feet away.

Access to most of the necessary information is not available to the employees due to current administrative procedural guidelines. These current procedures are inflexible, inefficient, much more expensive than necessary and even causes the loss of significant revenues.

For example, due to the opioid crisis, the need for foster care services in Ohio has increase exponentially. Many counties are finding it almost impossible to find the necessary safe havens for our children and afford the skyrocketing fiscal demands of providing this service. Federal reimbursement funds are available for children who are place in foster care if they are already receiving Medicaid, T.A.N.F. (cash assistance), or S.N.A.P (food stamps) services. However, because of the siloed nature of Ohio's social services system, the child services fiscal officer cannot gain access to the other siloed systems in the short time window necessary required to report what benefits the child is already receiving. Therefore, Ohio does not receive the urgently needed federal reimbursement funds so necessary for our children's welfare. It is estimated that Ohio could be losing multiple millions of dollars. Each penny precious to our children's welfare.

According to Director Potts, this bill will create perhaps the most effective tool available to detect and investigate fraud. These days every group has a shortage of workers, limited resources and limited time to commit to fraud investigation. With this tool in-hand, an investigator could quickly view a client's total portfolio of services and detect inconsistencies between the various state public assistance files. This can be accomplished quickly and efficiently to help determine that the client's vital information is accurately and uniformly reported in all of Ohio's Public Assistance Systems. A client's identity, number of dependents, reported income, address, any disabilities, etc. would be available to review. Reviewing this information in a timely and efficient manner is vital to providing best service and investigating potential fraud. Today investigations must be conducted manually system by system, in a very time consuming inefficient manner.

According to LSC no information sharing allowed under the provisions of Sub House Bill 340 is a violation of federal or state law. The major roadblock constantly referenced by those concerned with this type of interconnectivity are potential violations of federal law. However, based on LSC's research and discussions with other states any potential problems with federal law can be worked through. Additionally, to comfort those with such concerns the bill specifically states, "that no information may be shared that is in violation of state or federal law."

Sub HB 340 passed out of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee with a unanimous vote. This also passed with a unanimous floor vote in the full House and 61 co-sponsors. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.