



Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association

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Joel Potts, Executive Director

**Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony on House Bill 366
Joel Potts, Executive Director
Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association
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Chairman Bacon, Vice-Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent on House Bill 366, which would update Ohio's child support guidelines.

My name is Joel Potts and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association. We represent Ohio's 88 county departments of job and family services, of which sixty-seven of these agencies also serve as the local child support enforcement agency.

Updating and modernizing Ohio's child support guidelines is long overdue and greatly desired.

Federal law has three broad objectives (or guidelines) for state child support programs. They are:

1. To enhance the adequacy of orders for child support by making them more consistent with economic evidence on the cost of child rearing;
2. To improve the equity of orders by assuring more comparable treatment of cases with similar circumstances; and
3. To improve the efficiency of adjudicating child support orders by encouraging voluntary settlements and reducing time required to resolve contested cases.

The federal law also further requires states to review their guidelines at least every four years and make modifications when appropriate.

We have been utilizing the same guidelines structure in this state since 1992. At the time of the last legislative update to the guidelines, the data used was from the early to mid-1980's. These outdated numbers do not reflect current economic times or consumer expense trends, and do not reflect the modern economy. Utilizing current data will allow us to more easily and justifiably establish orders based on an ability to pay.

Additionally, this bill would support working parents and help address poverty. Too many Ohio children live in poverty and their households lack resources to provide the basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. The best way to decrease poverty, reduce dependency on public assistance benefits, stabilize families, and improve the standard of living for all Ohioans is through work. At the local JFS agencies we heavily invest in work and training programs and strongly encourage policy development that supports employment.

Ensuring child support payments are made is a key component in our strategy to improve a family's economic wellbeing. Ohio's child support program is a national model, collecting \$8.25 for every dollar invested - thirty-three percent above the national average. Investments in this program are extremely cost effective, lift children out of poverty, reduce dependency on public assistance programs, and support families. Families receiving public assistance benefits will leave the program almost twice as fast as cases where no child support order is established, or collections are made.

Unfortunately, in too many cases the obligor is unable to fulfill his or her child support obligation, resulting in legal issues, animosity between the parents, stress for the child and even encourage obligors' participating in the underground economy. In these instances, our ability to collect on orders and provide funding to the family is diminished. Updating Ohio's guidelines will improve a parent's ability to pay based on more realistic orders, allow for parenting time adjustments, improve healthcare coverage, make collections easier and more equitable in multi-family situations, and recognize the costs of child care in establishing child support orders. These changes will make it easier for obligor parents to work and provide ordered support. (The statewide average for orders with collections is 66 percent. However, the child support collection rate for our lowest dollar amount orders is only 30 percent.)

There are over one-million children in Ohio needing child support. Local child support enforcement agencies successfully collect nearly \$2 billion a year for these families, but more can be done. This legislation promotes the best interest of the child and the self-sufficiency of all the family members.

As a representative of statewide county JFS agencies, family self-sufficiency (whenever possible) is the goal of every program we administer. Improving child support collections is one of the easiest, most cost-effective methods to improve the lives of the children in our system. This bill would go far to enhance Ohio's child support program.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to speak as a proponent of House Bill 366. I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to working with you to finalize legislation which meets the needs of the families we serve.