

TUSCARAWAS COUNTY CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



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Senate Finance Sub-Committee on Health and Medicaid
Testimony of Traci Berry, Esq.
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HB166

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Sub-Committee, my name is Traci Berry and I am the Director of the Tuscarawas County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) and the 2019 President of the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association (OCDA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 166. We come before you today to request an additional \$3 million in funding for county Child Support Agencies.

County Child Support Agencies are on the front lines in providing services to over one million children in Ohio. We are much more than a collection agency. We work diligently every day to establish paternity, establish and enforce child and medical support orders, locate parents, and modify orders when family circumstances have changed. However, our county agencies are facing many obstacles in serving our families, including a rising caretaker caseload, access to technology to increase efficiencies, and personnel costs.

You have heard testimony regarding the increasing number of children in kinship care or in the care of county children service agencies. They are our children, too. In April 2014,

Tuscarawas County CSEA managed child support cases with 973 caretaker relatives. This past month we had child support cases with 1,102 caretaker relatives, an increase of approximately 4% in five years with each year higher than the previous. These grandparents, aunts, uncles and adult siblings come to us for help for the children they are caring for in their homes. These are difficult cases with multiple families and a variety of needed services. Oftentimes we must first locate the parents and establish legal paternity before we can begin to establish orders to get the needed support into these caretaker homes where children are residing.

In Tuscarawas County, our CSEA serves over 24,000 men, women, and children. We have changed our approach recently to make an often difficult 18+ year relationship with our families less intimidating and more customer-friendly from our first contact. We greet new parents and caregivers personally and arm them with the information and knowledge necessary to navigate the child support system and to make the best decisions for their unique situations. We've been recognized across the state for our approach. It's our people who have made this approach work, because they are parents and relative caregivers, too. As the Governor said, a child has but one chance to grow up, and the Tuscarawas County CSEA works every day to ensure that our children receive their child support.

But, we are at a crossroads. We are facing rising costs for technology and personnel. Many of our counties, including mine, are also operating with less money due to a change in our funding formula last year. We have a digital filing system that's more microfiche than useful and we need to make changes with our technology to increase efficiencies. Tuscarawas County CSEA is taking advantage of the Enterprise Document Management System (EDMS), which is an imaging system to increase efficiencies across the state, but to do so I was forced to choose between replacing a retiring employee or buying into EDMS. The EDMS will not do her job. Her job is to conduct support order modifications and explain that process to families. It's something that cannot be automated. Yet the statewide document management system will enable employees to keep track of the necessary paperwork in a more effective and efficient manner. Our copiers and scanners are too old to talk to the new system, so they must be replaced. We need more outreach to the public, the private bar and the courts, but do not have the personnel to further these key relationships. We want to take advantage of simple things such as text message reminders of hearings,

but we cannot afford the software. We cannot provide help for our families without adequate funding.

Tuscarawas County was one of the counties who lost funding with the change in the allocation methodology for state dollars. We lost 24% of our state funding; funding necessary to serve our families. Funding that is utilized to bring in matching federal dollars at a 66% reimbursement rate. Counties across Ohio are forced to choose between customer service and upgrading equipment, technology advancement and staffing levels necessary to do the work our families need. If our program isn't appropriately funded, we will fail our children. Paternity will not be established, support will not be collected, and back support will go unpaid. Please help us prevent this oncoming crisis.

Child Support is key to over one million children in Ohio. Please support our request for \$3 million dollars in additional state funding to line item 600502 to harness an additional \$6 million in federal funding. We believe Ohio cannot have a budget focused on children and families without adequately funding the child support program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.