



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Ohio Senate
Senate Finance Committee
Testimony on HB166
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Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Angela Sausser and I am the Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's 88 county Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for and promotes child protection program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities. We are pleased to provide this proponent testimony in support of HB 166.

As you are aware, Ohio's children services system is in severe crisis, largely attributed to the opioid epidemic. This severe crisis equates to 26% more children in foster care than five years ago-- almost 3,500 more children. On any given day, Ohio now has nearly 16,000 children in out-of-home care.

With more children in care with more complex needs, placement costs (room and board for children in a foster home, group home, or residential treatment facility) have risen rapidly. Between 2013 and 2018, these placement costs have increased by 40%, (\$109 million) to \$384 million per year. This is not sustainable for any county in Ohio.

Ohio's children services system desperately needs the proposed investments in HB 166 to stabilize today's severe crisis in children services and begin the reform so urgently needed.

My testimony includes a detailed summary of the HB 166 investments that support the children services system. **We ask the Senate Finance Committee to please maintain these very needed investments that are critical to achieving better outcomes for children and families.**

We also ask that the Senate restore language for the kinship caregiver program and the dedicated \$15M earmark in TANF back into HB 166. This program went into effect in March 2019. If the language and earmark are not restored, there will be a gap in assistance for kinship caregivers.

In my 20 years of public service and advocacy on children's issues, I have never seen such dedication and leadership from the General Assembly and the Governor in meeting the needs of children long neglected by public policy.

This is truly a stunning and remarkable budget for children, their families, and the children services system that will have a lasting impact and bring a new opportunity to begin reforming our system so we can achieve the goal of a safe, stable, loving family for all Ohio children.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

HB 166 investments that connect to the children services crisis and our reform include:

- \$60M/year – added to the State Child Protection Allocation (JFS Line 600523), direct funding to county PCSAs to assist with the severe crisis and begin to stabilize
- \$5M/year – for county PCSAs to staff foster and kinship families recruitment and support, added to the State Child Protection Allocation (JFS Line 600523)
- \$25M/year – to assist PCSAs with the expensive and rising placement costs for youth with multiple system needs in custody or to prevent youth from entering custody (JFS Line 600523)
- \$4.65M/year – to support evidence-based practices that achieve results of preventing children from entering care and reducing the length of stay in foster care, including Ohio START, 30 Days to Family, and Permanency Roundtables (JFS Line 600523)
- \$6M/year – to support continuing and expanding Ohio START program from 32 counties today to 64 counties by the end of the biennium (MHAS Line 336421)
- \$3.5M/year – to establish a robust statewide kinship navigator program (JFS Line 600523), will draw down \$3.5M in federal matching funds – removed from HB 166; program included in HB14 (Rep. Boyd and Rep. Baldrige)
- **\$15M/year – maintain the current kinship caregiver program (JFS TANF earmark) – removed from HB 166**
- \$3.4M/year to support technology needs for caseworkers to be more productive in the field (JFS Line 600450)

Other proposed investments in HB 166 that connect with children and families involved or at risk of being involved with children services and support the [PCSAO Continuum of Care](#)

[Reform plan](#) include:

- \$6M/year in the OhioMHAS budget for crisis services. These are needed to prevent children from coming into foster care or reentering care.
- \$7.5M/biennium in the OhioMHAS budget to expand up to 30 specialized court dockets that often involve families with children in foster care or at risk of entering foster care.

- \$10M/year in the Dept. of Medicaid budget for multi-system youth innovations. These are services not covered today by Medicaid but would put them on the pathway for coverage and future expansion across the state. These services, such as PEP, would prevent multi-system youth from having to enter custody of PCSAs for services.
- Behavioral Health Care Coordination in the Medicaid's budget – first time ever that the Dept. of Medicaid will develop a separate model for children which is desperately needed. This effort will create intensive care coordination models that specialize in multi-system youth and assist in preventing custody relinquishment.
- \$625M/biennium in the Dept. of Education budget for student wellness and success funds. A target population for these new wraparound services will be youth involved with the children services system. These services would assist in meeting needs of children in the schools and thus, lessen the need for children services involvement.
- \$83M/biennium in the Dept. of Health budget for increasing Help Me Grow home visits. These evidence-based home visit programs assist families to safely maintain children at home, promote child development, and prepare children for school.