



## OHIO JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

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*Joel Potts, Executive Director*

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Ohio House of Representatives Commerce and Labor Committee

Testimony in support of House Bill 23

February 17, 2021

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Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association

Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 23. My name is Laura Abu-Absi and I am the deputy director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association, serving the county departments of job and family services in Ohio's 88 counties. Most of Ohio's job and family services system is state-supervised, county-administered – including Ohio's adult protective services program.

County departments are responsible for receiving reports 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of older adults. They also must investigate these reports in a timely manner as well as evaluate the need for and, when possible, arrange for any necessary protective services.

We appreciate the leadership of Representative Plummer and Representative West in ensuring peace officers and EMS personnel will receive training related to identifying and interacting with individuals with dementia. You likely have heard from other proponents about why such a training is warranted and how it will benefit both first responders and the individuals they are likely to encounter who have Alzheimer's or dementia.

We especially support the component of this proposed training that addresses identifying and reporting incidents of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of individuals with dementia. We know that due to a variety of factors, elder abuse is underreported. The National Council on Aging estimates that approximately 1 in 10 Americans aged 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse. Additionally, as cited by the National Center on Elder Abuse, people with dementia and Alzheimer's can be more susceptible to abuse because of impairments in memory, communication abilities, and judgement. Having first responders trained with a focus on reporting suspected abuse, neglect and exploitation will help increase reports for all older adults to county department of job and family services.

We do have an amendment request on this provision. We request the bill set forth that first responders report suspected abuse, neglect, and exploitation to the county department of job and family services, as already set forth for mandated reporters such as peace officers and EMS personnel in ORC Section 5101.63. The current version of the bill has the training directing such reports to the office of attorney general. While the attorney general's elder justice unit is a valued partner in the work of protecting older adults, the county departments are the entities charged with receiving and investigating

these reports. If not corrected, reports made by first responders may take longer to reach the county department because calling the attorney general's office first would mean a multi-step process; first responders could spend more of their precious time making these reports and there could be a delay in investigations.

One other minor change we suggest to the bill would be to include the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services in a consulting role in the development of this training for first responders. This is because current law sets forth in ORC Section 5101.62 that in addition to making training available to protective services caseworkers, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has the responsibility to:

(B) Develop and make available educational materials for individuals who are required under section [5101.63](#) of the Revised Code to make reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation;

(C) Facilitate ongoing cooperation among state agencies on issues pertaining to the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of adults.

Given the work already being done in this arena by ODJFS, it will ensure the messaging, training and protocols being shared with first responders align with the processes being set forth by the agency responsible for supervising adult protective services in Ohio. This will help minimize confusion between first responders and the county department and ensure these often complex situations can be addressed as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate the work being done by the sponsor and committee on this important piece of legislation and ask for your support in harmonizing the language with existing requirements in Ohio Revised Code.