



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee  
Interested Party Testimony HB4  
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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, and Ranking Member Liston, my name is Mary Wachtel and I am the Director of Public Policy for the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county public children services agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

I am here today to provide Interested Party testimony on HB4, regarding county child abuse and neglect memorandums of understanding, cross-reporting of child abuse and neglect reports by PCSAs to law enforcement agencies, and notification of reporter rights. Since its introduction, we have had the opportunity to meet with the bill's sponsors, Rep. Manchester and Rep. Plummer, and have come to a better understanding of the intent and purpose of the bill. We agree that timely, effective communication among local partners is a key part of keeping children safe and this bill can help assure that communication occurs.

The focus of my testimony today is on several suggestions to help ensure that PCSAs and local partners can effectively operationalize the provisions of the bill.

- 1) Require Board of County Commissioners approval and ODJFS audit of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) biennially, rather than annually. Once the MOU is compliant with HB4, its approval period should extend beyond one year — we suggest a two-year approval period. A biennial approval period will continue to ensure frequent review and approval of the MOU and aligns with requirements for other agreements; for example, see [5101.21](#), *Written grant agreements between director and county*.

- 2) Narrow the types of reports that are forwarded to law enforcement. As drafted, the bill requires PCSAs to forward **all** reports of child abuse and neglect. We agree with forwarding all reports of child abuse. However, recognizing that definitions of neglect differ within child welfare code (see ORC [2151.03](#) *Neglected child defined* and [2151.011](#) *Juvenile court definitions*) and criminal code (see ORC [2919.22](#) *Endangering children*), we suggest that only certain categories of neglect reports be required to be forwarded. This will help ensure that law enforcement is involved with cases that are most likely to have criminal conduct. We suggest that the certain categories of neglect be identified by ODJFS through the rule-making process. It is important to note that PCSAs would still have the ability to forward additional types of neglect reports as needed even with this change.
  
- 3) Regarding the bill's mandates that PCSAs provide follow-up information to all reporters who provide contact information. We agree that providing follow-up information to mandated reporters who request that information is important. While we know that sometimes this does not occur, we are not aware of any data or indicators that show there is a systemic failure on the part of PCSAs to provide this follow-up information when requested. Given this, we suggest consideration be given to maintaining the current requirement that follow-up be provided to those who request it, rather than require this follow-up automatically to all who provide contact information. On a related note, I'd like to point out that the proposed ombudsman's office included in the Executive Budget can help with this if/when PCSAs do not provide follow-up information as required.

We ask that you consider these suggestions in your deliberations on HB4. I am happy to answer any questions.