



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee

Proponent testimony Sub 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.

Last month, I testified before this committee 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. I presented three suggested changes 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.
- 2) Narrow the types of neglect reports that are forwarded to law enforcement by requiring only certain categories of neglect reports be forwarded, rather than all neglect reports.
- 3) Consider maintaining the current requirement that PCSAs provide follow-up information to reporters who request it, rather than require this follow-up automatically to all who provide contact information

Am Sub HB4 addresses our two biggest concerns by moving from an annual to a biennial MOU review process and by requiring only certain categories of neglect reports be forwarded. In addition, the sub bill includes language establishing a process which allows a juvenile court, if it

determines probable cause exists, to issue an order, without a hearing, authorizing a PCSA to interview or examine a child who may be abused, neglected, or dependent if the child's parent refuses the PCSA reasonable access to the child. This language was developed in partnership among the Ohio Judicial Conference, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, and PCSAO to address a recognized, longstanding issue facing Ohio's children services system.

For these reasons, we support Am Sub HB4 and thank the sponsors for these important amendments to the bill. I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.