



COSHOCTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB & FAMILY SERVICES
Public Assistance • Children Services • Workforce Development • Child Support
Danny Brenneman, Director

Good Morning Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and other distinguished Committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on Child Welfare from the perspective of one rural, East-Central Ohio County. My Name is Danny Brenneman and I'm the executive director of Coshocton County Job & Family Services. Our agency provides services in the areas of workforce development, child support enforcement, public assistance, child welfare and represent our family and children first council.

Financially in our child welfare area, we are broke, to use blunt terms. Just this Monday I met with my Commissioners to review our inability to continue to pay for kids in care at the current rate and cost and that, as an agency, we've done everything imaginable and then some with our internal finances to keep current with foster providers and facilities. Our Commissioners understand the problem and scenario and that this is a County/State crisis; not just an agency one. That said, our own County's General Fund could not even sustain the costs we realize currently. Since 2014, Coshocton's costs for kids in care has risen 400% to approximately \$2,300,000 for 2020, or nearly \$200,000 per month. And these are costs we have little if any control or influence of.

The costs we are realizing mount and continue because of increased census (now 62 kids in agency custody monthly average compared with 18 in 2013) as well as increased daily costs and more difficult cases with multiple barriers and fewer placement options. We're still reeling from substance abuse in our community. In a recent sample, nearly 80% of new cases had substance abuse as a deciding or influencing factor. Children are being born to drug-addicted mothers and dysfunctional families and the effects are long lasting if not permanent. One current placement for a child with significant barriers daily cost is \$400. That's \$146,000 per year.

The citizens of Coshocton County understand and are generous and supportive. We have a levy

that has been renewed several times since 1998 – this renewal generally passes by significant margins. In 2018 and with drastically rising foster costs, we attempted a new .4 mill levy. This levy failed by 3%. The clear message back to me was that our citizens are able and willing to continue support but are simply not able to add additional burden. In addition, we've recently lost significant tax revenue as a large facility (American Electric Power – Conesville) closed. This reduced our levy revenue and only compounds our dire situation. Regarding the single \$400 per-day case mentioned above; as a point of reference this case consumes about 27% of the total proceeds from our levy.

While staff turnover and trauma are high and pay is low and hours are long, our caseworkers along with dedicated service providers in our County work with diligence to provide the best services possible. I'd put the work, care, and effort of my staff against any in the industry or otherwise. But we need help.

I've worked for Coshocton County since 1995 with positions in workforce development, finance, mid-level management and now as executive director. I've never seen a more critical or pivotal point in any of the service areas in our agency or community. Investment in child welfare is *assurance* and *insurance* that we can provide quality services to children and families to keep them safe and healthy. This, in turn, minimizes time and resources needed "down the road" and undoubtedly saves lives.

Members of this Committee, I simply ask for your full consideration and support for additional investment to the child welfare system at the local level. Federal and state changes and mandates are upon us, and your investment will assure our ability to prevent incidence of child abuse and neglect as well as meet the needs of unfortunate but ongoing costs. My testimony only represents one small County but speaks for many similar in our State.



I want to leave you with an example of success when we work together. The pictures you've been presented are of James. He turned one-year old last Fall. James was born to an addicted mother who could not take care of him. James is doing well. Because of the work of many dedicated professionals in the child welfare system, James will be adopted into a permanent, loving family. In fact, his adoption is being finalized today, as we speak. What could be a higher priority for us all?

I truly thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.

