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House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
House Bill 110 – Interested Party
County Commissioners Association of Ohio

March 4, 2021

Chair Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony on House Bill 110 (HB 110).

Counties administer many human services programs to Ohioans on behalf of the state. County commissioners oversee local job and family service agencies (CDJFSs), public children services agencies (PCSAs) and child support enforcement agencies (CSEAs).

During the last biennium, the DeWine administration and General Assembly significantly increased the state general revenue fund allocation to the state child protective system. CCAO remains grateful for this investment and is pleased to see it retained in the current version of the budget. County PCSAs are still working hard to stabilize the child protective system. The number of children in foster care remains high due to the addiction epidemic and pandemic and placement costs also continue to rise. Workforce challenges also remain for PCSAs as workers leave due to stress and secondary trauma.

The children services system is experiencing reform at both the state and federal level. While HB 110 does include some additional investments for these policy shifts, these resources solely address state costs. At the end of the 133rd General Assembly, the legislature created the state Kinship Support Program through the passage of Senate Bill 310. This program will increase the number of caregivers receiving per diems from the county. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) estimates the cost to counties will be an additional \$25 million in each year of the biennium. HB 110 does not include additional dollars for counties to account for this increased cost.

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) will be implemented nationwide by October 1, 2021. Through dramatic federal funding changes, Family First shifts the focus of the child welfare system to prevention – keeping children out of foster care and with their families – by encouraging states to support families through evidence-based programs in mental health services, substance abuse treatment and improved parenting skills. While the federal government will provide a 50% match for funding these programs, the other 50% of the cost will fall to the states.

Additionally, Family First ends federal reimbursement of placement costs for children in institutional settings that do not meet a new standard called Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP). PCSAs will be able to place children in non-QRTP settings through 2024, but if the residential center is not a QRTP, PCSAs will not be able to receive federal reimbursement for those placement costs. Because it is estimated that less than



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half of Ohio's residential centers will meet this requirement by October 1, 2021, we anticipate an increase in county share of placement costs.

The combination of increased children in foster care, higher placement costs, the new Kinship Support Program and the implementation of Family First will put more financial strain on the child protective system in Ohio. Without additional resources to respond to these changes, counties will not be able to effectuate change in the system. CCAO supports the inclusion of an additional \$50 million in the State Child Protection Allocation housed in ALI 600523 to address these new costs to the system.

CCAO supports the continued investment in multi-system youth in HB 110 including the \$25 million for placement costs and the \$36 million over the biennium to prevent custody relinquishment.

CCAO supports the nearly \$3 million per fiscal year increase to the state match allocation for county CSEAs. This allocation has been flat funded since FY12 while the workload of CSEAs has increased. One in three Ohio children are impacted by Ohio's child support system, and the services our CSEAs provide them are essential.

County job and family service agencies (CDJFS) administer several programs to Ohioans, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) and Medicaid. While caseloads have increased for these programs, local program support dollars have decreased. The funding per SNAP/Medicaid participant is currently \$17.79, the lowest the state has ever provided. CCAO supports the Ohio Job and Family Service Directors' Association request for an additional \$7.7 million per fiscal year for the administration of these programs. This funding will allow CDJFSs to remain timely in processing applications and determinations, investigating fraud and providing quality customer service.

CDJFSs also administer a uniform adult protective services (APS) program for older adults who require protective from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. CCAO supports increasing the state contribution to APS by \$1.5 million in each fiscal year to cover at least one full time APS caseworker per county (\$65,000/county).

HB 110 retains FY21 levels of funding for family and children first councils (FCFCs). These councils work to reduce duplication of services and to help families navigate health, social, and human services. Additionally, the councils have been integral in distributing multi-system youth custody relinquishment funding across the counties. In order to perform these functions, regardless of size, each county was allocated \$20,000. This amount was decreased in FY10 to \$15,750 per county. The councils serve a crucial role in administratively coordinating services for children in our counties. CCAO supports an increase in the annual allocation to councils to bring FCFCs to \$30,000 per county. The bill also allows the continuation of family and children first flexible spending pools, which will provide flexibility for our counties.

RC 3709.291, as proposed in HB 110, would allow the board of a combined health district to place a property tax levy for current expenses on the ballot without consultation or approval of the county commissioners. CCAO believes that it is not advisable to allow unelected boards to propose tax levies. CCAO supports giving boards of county commissioners and county councils discretion regarding the submission, type (renewal, increase, reduction or replacement), millage and duration of property tax levies submitted to the voters for the purpose of funding a health district. If the combined district covers multiple counties, commissioners should also have discretion over multi-county levies. Should this discretion not be granted to boards of county commissioners, it is important commissioners should retain the levy authority, in order to maintain some accountability and to facilitate a public forum in which health officials may discuss and justify the need for the levy.

As you discuss the priorities for Ohio's operating budget for this biennium, CCAO believes it is essential for the General Assembly to consider and preserve these investments in crucial services provided to Ohioans. Thank you for your consideration.