



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

Senate Judiciary Committee

Paul Pfeifer

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 7

April 27, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 7 on behalf of the Ohio Judicial Conference. I am Paul Pfeifer, Executive Director of the Judicial Conference.

I am testifying today to discuss three provisions in H.B. 7 that would positively impact Ohio's probate courts and help the courts provide better service to Ohio's citizens.

Guardianship Nonprofit Appointment

H.B. 7 would allow probate courts to appoint appropriate non-profit corporations organized under the laws of this state to be guardians of the person. This approach is presently available only for wards with developmental disabilities and non-profit corporations with a contractual relationship with the Department of Developmental Disabilities. These revisions to R.C. 2111.10 would create a small county alternative to the Guardianship Services Board as currently permitted in R.C. 2111.52. Last year, the OJC collaborated with Representative Skindell to further strengthen this proposal by clarifying that the nonprofit corporation appointed as guardian of a ward must be domiciled in Ohio and shall not be the residential caregiver, health care provider or employer of the ward.

Name Change Modernization

This proposal would modernize Chapter 2717 of the Revised Code and conform to the work of the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles in its Ohio REAL ID program issuing federally compliant drivers' licenses and identification cards according to Department of Homeland Security regulations. The change amends the existing name change procedure to make the process faster, more efficient and at a lower cost to applicants by eliminating hearing and publication notice mandates and granting probate courts more discretion to determine the best way to administer each action on a case-by-case basis. The proposal would also enact a new statutory procedure to allow probate courts to correct specific errors in a person's chain of identity so the individual's current legal name is conformed for all purposes in all identity documents.

The proposed statutory changes will improve public service by simplifying the process for changing a person's legal name or correcting errors or inconsistencies in their legal name in various identity documents.

Mental Health APRN Proposal

This proposal would permit specially trained mental health nurse practitioners to testify and provide opinions on civil commitment hearings at both the initial phase and at extension hearings. Current law requires that doctors provide these opinions, and probate courts have reported having to cancel mental health hearings because there were no doctors available to testify. This is both a due process concern as well as a treatment concern. The shortage of psychiatrists exists throughout Ohio, but is especially acute in rural areas. Every county will benefit from this change permitting certain qualified advanced practice nurses to testify when doctors are unavailable.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 7. We also thank the sponsors, Representative Grendell and Representative Stewart, as well as the prior sponsor, Speaker Cupp, for their hard work on this bill the last two years. I am available to answer any questions you may have.