



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Families and Aging Committee  
Proponent testimony HB512  
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Chair Schmidt, Vice-Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for your consideration of this proponent testimony on HB 512 from the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). My name is Mary Wachtel, I am the Director of Public Policy at PCSAO, which is a membership-driven association of Ohio's 88 county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

PCSAO greatly appreciates Rep. Pavliga's commitment to address Ohio's ongoing treatment and placement crisis for youth, on behalf of youth in Portage County and across the state. Since PCSAO released our placement crisis report in February 2022, Rep. Pavliga has worked tirelessly with Dr. KelliJo Jeffries, Director of Portage County Job and Family Services (which includes children services) and with PCSAO to craft legislation focusing on crisis stabilization for youth. While Dr. Jeffries is not able to testify in person today, she has submitted written testimony which provides a compelling case for this bill; I encourage you to review her testimony.

PCSAO's placement report was based on a survey of county public children services agencies (PCSAs) which revealed that in 2021, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) children entered children services custody primarily because of mental health, developmental/intellectual disability, or as a diversion from juvenile corrections. In other words, nearly 1 in 4 children who entered foster care did so primarily for reasons other than abuse or neglect. Many of these youth present

with complex and challenging behaviors and too few providers (kinship caregivers, foster families, group homes, residential treatment facilities and other placements across Ohio) can accept placement and appropriately care for and treat them, due to lacking appropriate services and staff shortages. In addition, few providers are able to care for youth with co-occurring issues such as mental health and developmental/intellectual disability.

This lack of treatment and placement options has overwhelmed children services agencies. Frequently, it means youth in their custody are housed in PCSA offices, hospital emergency rooms and other ill-suited places for days, weeks and sometimes longer. The same survey revealed that 6% of children who entered PCSA custody in 2021 had to spend at least one night at the PCSA office.

This ongoing treatment and placement crisis means that youth with very complex, significant mental health and development disabilities are not able to access the necessary treatment for stabilization. Instead of being able to receive appropriate and available mental health and developmental/intellectual interventions, too many youth linger in PCSA offices, in emergency rooms, or in other settings where their conditions worsen. Too often, PCSAs are in the position of having to accept an available placement which may not be the most appropriate setting, meaning the placement is not skilled or equipped to address the youth's needs. When this happens, the placement provider may opt to discharge a youth, often with very little notice to the county PCSA, and the cycle starts again to find the next appropriate placement. As you can imagine, this creates more trauma for the youth, and stretches the capacity of PCSA staff, diverting time and energy from our core function of protecting children and strengthening families.

We appreciate the ongoing efforts of OhioRISE to build a stronger system of care for children with behavioral health needs. HB512 would create an additional treatment option that does not exist widely, if at all, in Ohio. By having access to short-term crisis stabilization beds and centers that could assess and address youth's acute mental health needs and development disabilities, while PCSAs and community partners work to identify more appropriate placement

and longer-term treatment options for these youth. And perhaps most importantly, we can shield youth from the additional trauma of sleeping at an agency or lingering in a hospital. While HB512 does not provide funding for the development and operations of emergency short-term crisis stabilization beds and centers, it would address the conflicting rule requirements between the departments of job and family services (now, children and youth), mental health and addiction services, and developmental disabilities which often prevent providers from serving youth with multi-system (mental health and developmental/intellectual) needs.

Finally, HB512 encourages the ongoing collaboration of the Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council agencies, associations, and local partners to continue finding solutions so that no child in Ohio will have to sleep even one night at a PCSA or board at a hospital due to no placement and treatment options. We are grateful and appreciative that the Governor's Office and the Department of Children and Youth continue to lead a Placement Crisis Working Group to identify these solutions. As those solutions come to fruition, we hope the General Assembly will support those efforts that will help to reduce this ongoing placement and treatment crisis for Ohio's children and youth, including passing HB512.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.