



House Homeland Security Committee
Interested Party Testimony of Theresa Ellison, Esq.
Clermont County DJFS-CSEA
December 11, 2024
SB37

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written Interested Party testimony on SB 37 on behalf of Clermont County CSEA. My name is Theresa Ellison, and I am an assistant director for the Clermont County DJFS overseeing the CSEA. I have been in this role for almost 4 years, and I have been a child support professional for 30 years. I am a member of the Ohio Child Support Professionals Association (OCSA), and I am the current president of the OCSA Cincinnati District. I have been a part of the OCSA Legislative Committee for more than 20 years.

In Clermont County we have approximately 10,000 child support cases and serve over 14,000 children. In FFY 2023, we collected over \$32 million dollars in child support. We were the best performing large size county in the state of Ohio for FFY 23. We have many administrative enforcement tools available to us as an agency, and one of the most effective involves the legislation currently in front of you, drivers' license suspensions. I would like to provide you with some details on how we use this very important tool to collect child support for the families of our community.

Our license suspension process begins with a thorough review of the cases, beginning with the payment history. We look to see if we have received less than 50% of the obligation for at least the last three months. Next in the process, the parent paying child support must be in default to eligible for a license suspension. The default process affords this parent—called the child support obligor—with notice and an opportunity to be heard on the issue of non-payment of support prior to the default finding becoming final. The default process includes an opportunity for judicial review should the Obligor disagree with the CSEA's determination.

The next step in the process is to ensure, to the best that we can, that the obligor has never provided any type of medical evidence or is receiving any type of benefits that would preclude the suspension. We also attempt to reach out to the Obligor by phone to discuss their case. Once this review is completed, we issue the required pre-suspension letter.

This is the point at which so many of our Obligor become attentive. The letter lets them know that their case is eligible for suspension and encourages them to contact the local CSEA within the next 14 days. Once they contact us, we can offer them several options to come into compliance. These include setting up a short-term payment plan, making a payment equal to at least 50% of the obligation for the last 3 months, or reporting new employment or other withholding source, or providing medical documentation that they cannot work. This is the point where we normally can obtain information or much needed support for the children of the order.

Unfortunately, the pre-suspension letter does not always have the desired effect and we move forward with license suspension. Once suspended, the license can be reinstated with the options listed above. The only difference now is the payment option which requires a payment equal to the full obligation for the last three months and not 50% of that amount. We will also reinstate a license with a letter from an employer who promises employment if the obligor regains his license.

As noted above, with information that the person is employed and our agency can do a wage withholding, our office must reinstate the driver's license.

To emphasize how important this tool is to our department, in 2023 alone, our driver's license reinstatements collected \$347,561.96 in child support for the children of our community. Our office has several reports that we work monthly, and if an obligor has returned to work and has a wage assignment in place, but has failed to contact us, we will automatically reinstate that person's suspended driver's license so that there is no issue with that person going to work. We want this person to travel to and from work unimpeded in order to pay their child support. That is always the ultimate goal.

We strive to keep in mind that we must use these enforcement tools in a way that shows compassion, while also ensuring that parents meet their duty to pay child support for their child. I would ask that this committee remember that child support is not a debt like others being discussed with this bill. It is a statutory duty for a parent to support their child.

Please reach out to your local CSEA if you have questions about how they utilize license suspension. It is an important and effective remedy to incentivize compliance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on this bill.