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Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

Senate Health Committee
Substitute House Bill 33 – Interested Party Testimony
David Kern, Defiance County Commissioner

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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Substitute House Bill 33 on behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO). My name is David Kern and I currently serve as a Defiance County Commissioner and as member of the CCAO Board of Directors and CCAO Human Services Committee.

Counties are true partners of the state in many ways, and that is no different for our human services programs. Our departments and local boards administer many programs to serve everyone from children to seniors. The previous two budget cycles have brought historic levels of funding for many of these services and we are pleased that Sub. House Bill 33 increases investment in many of these areas to continue strengthening the state-county partnership.

One of the most challenging tasks facing counties today is the administration of child welfare through our public children services agencies (PCSAs). The placement crisis and elevated costs, the need for a strengthened continuum of care, and workforce shortages each present unique challenges in all 88 counties.

Our agencies report that the children entering care have more complicated needs, often from multiple systems, including behavioral health, developmental disabilities, and youth services. The cost of care remains high across all placement settings, especially for children with high-acuity needs. Many cases are also traumatic for our child protective caseworkers and, as a result, we are experiencing higher than normal turnover and a workforce shortage. Even counties who have successfully passed levies to cover these important services are struggling to provide the resources required.

Sub. House Bill 33 includes an additional \$60 million over the biennium for the state child protection allocation, which goes directly to county PCSAs to administer child welfare. This funding will greatly help counties meet the challenges they currently face and will help strengthen Ohio's families.

Sub. House Bill 33 also sustains investment in two critical funds for serving multi-system youth: funds in the proposed Department of Children and Youth to assist PCSAs in providing services to multi-system youth who are in custody and funds in the Department of Medicaid to prevent custody relinquishment. CCAO supports the continued prioritization of services for these children.



CCAO is concerned that the decrease in the Family and Children Services line item will force cuts in key programs and investments, including Ohio START, Kinship Support Program, Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program, Ohio Bridges, prevention services, and efforts to grow the number of foster homes across the state. We respectfully request these dollars be restored so children and families can continue to access these services and programs.

Commissioners also value and support the work of our local Family and Children First Councils (FCFCs). These councils diligently help families navigate a patchwork of state and federal programs that serve children with complex needs. Sub. House Bill 33 proposes the first increase in funding for local FCFCs since state fiscal year 2010, bringing the amount each council receives for administration to \$30,750. CCAO appreciates the greater investment in the coordination of these services and supports a further increase to \$50,000 per year.

Counties also serve our older Ohioans and are charged with providing a uniform adult protective services program for older adults who require protection from abuse, neglect or exploitation. Sub. House Bill 33 proposes an increase in funding for adult protective services, including a base allocation of \$80,000 for each county. CCAO supports this investment to address our growing APS needs.

Additionally, the proposed budget includes one-time Healthy Aging Grants designed to help Ohioans age in place and delay the transition to institutional care. These grants would flow through the boards of county commissioners in all 88 counties. Commissioners would have the flexibility to choose local partners to address gaps and provide a range of services, from minor home improvements, to transportation, to personal care. CCAO supports this investment to foster increased independence and a high quality of life for our seniors.

Our county JFS agencies administer many public assistance programs, including food assistance, cash assistance, TANF, and Medicaid. CCAO supports language ensuring an increase in funding for the administration of these programs that will help counties recruit, train, and retain staff. CCAO also supports additional dollars for the administration of the SNAP Employment & Training Program, which would allow counties to enhance the program to allow it to be a true path toward self-sufficiency for individuals receiving public assistance.

Counties also administer the publicly funded child care system in Ohio and, through these services, understand that gaps in provider coverage exist across the state, as well as the affordability issues many individuals, particularly women, face when finding care for their children. Child care is a vital workforce support for our communities, including county employees. CCAO is thankful for the proposal to increase the eligibility of publicly funded child care to 160% of the federal poverty level in House Bill 33, and supports a further increase to 200% of the federal poverty level.

Mental health and addiction services for our communities, especially at the intersection of these services and county jails, are critically important to CCAO members. Sub. House Bill 33 decreases funding for criminal justice services, including psychotropic drug and medication assisted treatment reimbursement programs for county jails. Forensic center services to courts and jails will also receive a funding cut. Our forensic centers decrease the wait time for mandatory competency evaluations that

are required before people can enter treatment from the jail.

Insufficient capacity in our state psychiatric hospitals often results in individuals remaining in a county jail when treatment in a hospital would be more appropriate. Sub. House Bill 33 decreases funding for these hospitals, which would prevent the hospitals from operating at current capacity and eliminate the potential for a planned 80 bed expansion. CCAO respectfully requests these proposed investments be restored to the As Introduced levels.

Additionally, a reduction in the Continuum of Care line item and accompanying earmarks will result in an \$11 million decrease in funding for local ADAMH Boards. Crisis services, services in jails, prevention services, housing services, and other recovery supports in our communities will be cut without this funding. CCAO requests that the funding be restored to the As Introduced levels.

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