



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**

451 West Third Street
P.O. Box 972
Dayton, Ohio 45422-1326

www.mcoho.org

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Judy Dodge
Carolyn Rice
Mary A. McDonald

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Michael B. Colbert

ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Geraldine Pegues

Montgomery County – Geraldine Pegues, Assistant County Administrator – Human Services
House Bill 7 – Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives – Children and Human Services Committee
March 11, 2025

Good morning Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and Children and Human Services Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent Testimony, supporting House Bill 7 categorical eligibility for foster and relative caregivers' childcare.

Protecting children and strengthening families are the core of Montgomery County Children Services' mission. They investigate thousands of claims of abuse and neglect each year and prevent dangerous situations by working with families and providing them with helpful and supportive resources. In 2024, we served 2,257 children and 1,467 families; investigated 1,835 child abuse/neglect reports and conducted 1,408 alternative response assessments; responded to 348 children with a dependency situation and served an additional 260 families in Need of Services. Additionally, we seek permanency for children that are in permanent custody through adoption or with family members, friends of the family or other caring adults. In 2024, we were able to secure permanency through adoptions for 71 children in our custody.

When children are placed in custody of Children Services, our goal is to reunify them with their families as soon as possible. While they are in our care, children are placed with kinship or foster caregivers when possible. These caregivers provide the love, care and stability our children need. When speaking with kinship and foster parents, they shared the following with our staff:

- They are unable to accept younger children or sibling groups due to the high cost of childcare.
- They need an increase in the per diem rate for younger children.
- They want the children in their care to qualify for publicly funded childcare to assist kinship and foster families.

Our children in foster care deserve high quality childcare experiences, and it should not be based on the kinship or foster caregivers' income. We are thankful that the caregivers are willing to love and support our children who have experienced trauma. In many instances, caregivers didn't have the ability to plan for the financial impact of providing childcare for one, two or more children. We all know that early childcare and education is important for all our children and especially for children in foster care.

Based on our placement numbers as of last week, we have 272 children between infant to six years old placed with kinship and foster families. With the passage of this legislation many more

b i r t h p l a c e o f i n n o v a t i o n

Montgomery County – Geraldine Pegues, Assistant County Administrator – Human Services
House Bill 7 – Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives – Children and Human Services Committee
March 11, 2025

of our children placed in foster care would be eligible to receive a high-quality childcare experience to help them grow and thrive.

In addition, we are a quadruple-combined agency and in our Family Assistance Division last year they processed on average 8,260 applications for childcare services. We know this number will increase with the passage of this legislation. While the definition of kinship is in existing law, being broadly stated in this legislation has the potential for significant financial implications. The proposed legislation doesn't identify funding to support this increase in costs.

We appreciate Representative White and Representative Ray for their efforts to ensure children who are placed in the custody of Children Services and placed with kinship and foster caregivers are eligible to receive childcare.

Montgomery County supports the following policy in the proposed legislation:

- Providing quality childcare and education for foster caregivers and kinship caregivers regardless of income.
 - Passage of this legislation may increase the number of kinship and foster caregivers by reducing their financial strain to provide childcare for children placed in their care. Kinship and foster caregivers are essential to the network of caregivers that help children in foster care grow into healthy youth and adults. This has the potential to positively impact our ability to recruit kinship and foster caregivers.
- The authorized providers listed in the bill under the oversight of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth.

Montgomery County has concerns with the financial cost impact, the broad definition of kin and the work and education requirements as they are currently listed in the proposed legislation:

- We recommend that the State add a GRF investment to cover the cost of serving kinship and foster caregivers.
 - Executive Budget for Fiscal Years 2026 – 2027 has the revenue line for TANF Federal Block grant going down to less than \$1,000,000 in 2027. We are concerned about the lack of sustainability for TANF funded services and supports, as this may set up a dynamic in the next biennium that could pit one valuable service against another.
- We recommend further review of the definition of kin as it is very broadly stated.
 - Narrowing the population could be a strategy to help make identifying an appropriate funding source more feasible.
- We ask that the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) be granted authority to provide flexibility to kinship and foster caregivers regarding the work and education requirements that are currently included in the bill. Many of our caregivers (kinship and foster) may be

Montgomery County – Geraldine Pegues, Assistant County Administrator – Human Services
House Bill 7 – Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives – Children and Human Services Committee
March 11, 2025

retired and/or one of the parents may be a stay-at-home parent. These caregivers have found it in their hearts to step up to provide care for children that are in the custody of Children Services. Based on the current bill language, this group of caregivers would not be eligible due to the work/education requirements.

Thank you for allowing us to address the proposed legislation and for your time today. I am available for additional questions or discussion and my contact information was provided.