

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 03/10/2025

Name: Cassandra Holtzmann

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Summit County Children Services

Position/Title: Executive Director

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): H.B. 7

Specific Issue: Publicly Funded Child Care for Foster and Kinship Caregivers

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5-10 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Summit County Children Services supports H.B. 7 to guarantee publicly funded child care for kinship and foster caregivers, regardless of income. SCCS support building flexibility into the law to expand the circumstances when a caregiver who has placement of an abused or neglected child may rely upon such child care for support. The special needs of this population of children, and the circumstances especially of kinship caregivers, may necessitate the use of child care beyond time at work or attending training. Child care support will incentivize people to become caregivers and will help build a local pool of home-based caregivers, in turn reducing the need to turn to more expensive and restrictive placements for children in need.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.



Summit County
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Building Families . . . Building Futures

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RE: Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee
Testimony in Support of H.B. 7
Publicly Funded Child Care for Foster and Kinship Caregivers

March 11, 2025

Dear Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for inviting us here today to speak in support of H.B. 7 and considering publicly funded child care for foster and kinship caregivers. My name is Cassandra Holtzmann and I am the Executive Director of Summit County Children Services.

Summit County Children Services (SCCS) is a public children services agency (PCSA) which provides child protection services to the County of Summit that includes the City of Akron metropolitan area. SCCS currently is responsible for 846 abused and neglected children who are placed in agency custody.

- The majority of children in agency custody are in Temporary Custody while we work toward family reunification or other permanency options.
- 170 children in agency custody were placed by the Juvenile Court in our Permanent Custody and are available for adoption.

SCCS relies upon a variety of caregivers to meet the needs of children in agency custody. As of December 2024, 265 children in agency custody were placed with kinship providers, 235 children were placed in foster placements, and 309 children were placed in purchased care. Purchased care includes therapeutic foster homes, group homes, and residential facilities.

Publicly funded child care for foster and kinship caregivers is the right thing to do for the caregivers and for abused and neglected children, and will help recruit and retain caregivers and grow the pool of available homes where children can be placed. This in turn will help to control placement costs.

SCCS has seen an exponential rise in paid placement costs that are unsustainable within our budget. Total 2024 paid placements were \$21,069,976 as compared to \$17,940,730 in 2023. This was an increase of over 17% year-over-year, even as the number of children in agency custody has decreased. SCCS is forecasting expenditures of approximately \$23 million dollars to meet placement costs for children in 2025. Residential facilities or group homes must sometimes be utilized as a fallback even for children who don't require such a high level of care, simply because an available traditional foster home or kinship placement cannot be identified.

Unfortunately, the pool of foster caregivers we can draw from has shrunk:

- At the beginning of 2024 SCCS had 144 certified foster homes, but by the end of 2024 that number had fallen to 132 traditional certified foster homes. This was a decrease from our pool of 2023 foster homes, and we've seen a steady decrease over the years in families willing to foster children. Approximately fifteen years ago, there were 300-350 foster homes within Summit County willing to accept placement of children.
- As far as foster home recruitment, from 2023 to 2024 SCCS saw a decrease of over 14% in families or individuals contacting our agency to inquire and learn more about becoming foster caregivers.
- Within Summit County, the highest level of removal of children from their families occurs within the zip code of 44306, yet there are currently only two (2) licensed foster homes in that zip code.
- As of the end of 2024, SCCS had 94 child specific kinship foster homes. Child specific kinship caregivers are usually relatives or family friends who choose to become licensed because wish they wish to care for and potentially take Legal Custody of a child with whom they already have a kinship relationship. While that is a wonderful permanency solution for that particular child, after Legal Custody is finalized, that kinship foster homes typically closes and is not available for possible placement of other children.

Because our pool of foster homes has shrunk, over 50% of our children must be placed outside of Summit County. Out-of-county placement pulls a child far away from friends, family, school, and their familiar community. It makes travel for visitation with biological family difficult. Agency caseworkers spend more time in their cars, traveling back and forth to these homes.

The high price of daycare is one of the most frequently asked questions when SCCS hosts informational meetings for prospective caregivers. Potential foster providers may disqualify

themselves from even considering fostering, due to worry about childcare costs. Many children come into agency custody due to emergency removals, sometimes in the middle of the night. A caregiver might have to immediately decide whether they can accept that child into their home. Worry over childcare costs compounds a multitude of other factors that go into that decision. SCCS has seen families decline to accept a placement where their per diem may be less than the cost of daycare. Placements have also disrupted based solely on the daycare cost, requiring SCCS to find a different placement and move the child. Placement changes cause additional trauma and disruption in children's lives.

Best practice, and our goal, is to place children with family members or kinship caregivers who have a relationship with the child or family, if that can be done safely. SCCS also strives to keep sibling groups together. When a child must be removed from their parent, maintaining ties to their community, attending the same school, and placement with an appropriate relative or familiar caregiver is ideal. Support for kinship caregivers is critical.

Publicly funded childcare is currently subject to income eligibility requirements, which are tied to percentages of the federal poverty level. Use of childcare is limited to a caregiver's time at work or educational training. Currently, the majority of our caregivers don't qualify for Title XX daycare. If a child in foster care is placed with a two-parent working family, and the family receives a per diem for placement, the family will likely not qualify. A kinship caregiver, such as a grandparent or retired person, also may not qualify as they may own their home or have assets that place them over eligibility limits. The requirement that publicly funded childcare only be utilized while the caregiver is at work or in school will not fit the circumstances of many retired or older kinship caregivers. And they need our help.

Caring for abused and neglected children can be different than caring for one's own child. Abused and neglected children have experienced trauma, whether from exposure to intimate partner violence, substance use, mental health problems or physical/sexual abuse. That trauma may manifest with behavioral acting out – tantrums, nightmares, school problems, or global delays due to neglect. Caregivers may need respite as they become exhausted meeting these needs. Because children in agency custody may have special needs or behavioral problems, locating a daycare and maintaining a child in a daycare can be a challenge. A kinship caregiver might be a grandparent, who has health concerns or other caregiving responsibilities if they have a spouse with health concerns. The infants or children they are entrusted with often require services or treatment, necessitating medical appointments, counseling appointments, physical/occupational therapy or speech therapy. The family

may need child care for other foster children placed with them to allow for time and travel to appointments for each child. Caregivers attend court hearings regarding the children in their care.

They attend trainings, and meetings at SCCS such as semi-annual review conferences.

Abused and neglected children especially benefit from participation in a daycare or preschool program which allows them to gain socialization skills and reading readiness to help prepare for kindergarten.

To fill this gap, SCCS is able to provide some limited childcare help for kinship caregivers and agency foster parents. SCCS views this financial assistance as critical in order to recruit, support and retain caregivers, yet these costs have risen:

- In 2022, SCCS spent \$660,504.56 on kinship daycare. In 2023, SCCS spent \$610,155 for kinship daycare. SCCS spent \$771,281 for kinship daycare for 2024. SCCS also provides financial support for daycare for traditional foster providers. As of mid-January 2025, 36 foster homes (54 children) were receiving an added daycare per diem to their payments to assist with daycare costs. 36 kinship homes (85 children) were receiving 60% to 100% of coverage through the agency's daycare assistance for childcare costs
- Even where SCCS does assist, our agency's assistance does not completely fill the gap. For a child age newborn through age two years old, SCCS provides a weekly daycare per diem of \$137.20, but the average weekly full time daycare cost for that child is \$350.00. That leaves a shortfall of \$212.80 each week, which is an out-of-pocket cost to that provider.

Providers, whether kinship or foster, are often unable to accept or maintain placement of children due to the high cost of daycare. This can be especially challenging when trying to place a sibling group made up of infant, toddler or preschool age children, as many families simply cannot afford it.

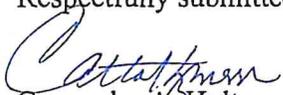
The caregiver who answers that call for help with "yes" deserves our support because they are providing for the most vulnerable and precious amongst us, our children.

In conclusion, Summit County Children Services supports H.B. 7 and requests the Committee to endorse the guarantee of publicly funded child care for foster and kinship caregivers, regardless of income eligibility. SCCS requests the Committee to support building flexibility into this law to expand the circumstances where a caregiver may rely upon such child care support. Doing so will incentivize people to become caregivers and will provide them with the support they need to provide quality care for children in need of our protection and loving care. SCCS submits that building and supporting its pool of local home-based caregivers who are willing and available to care for children in need will

reduce placement costs, decreasing the need to look to residential placements, group homes or commercial private networks for placement.

Thank you so much for your consideration to this important topic and the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to answer questions, and request that the Committee permit my colleague Catherine Van Horne to join me in answering any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,


Cassandra A. Holtzmann, JD, LPA
Executive Director

cc:

Catherine Van Horne, JD
Deputy Director/Chief Legal Counsel