



**Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
Proponent Testimony – House Bill 532**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Butler, and I serve as the Chief of Police for Independence PD, I am writing today representing the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) to offer our full support for House Bill 532, sponsored by Representative Kevin Miller.

This bill is a common-sense, necessary measure that addresses a critical public safety and child welfare gap in current Ohio law. It clarifies and strengthens the existing child protective system by ensuring immediate, professional intervention for vulnerable children, rather than relying on law enforcement officers, who are not trained social workers, to act as stopgap caretakers.

Law enforcement officers across the state are frequently the first responders when a child is found alone, abandoned, or in an unsafe situation, but who is not facing criminal charges. The immediate crisis begins when that child cannot be released to a parent or guardian, often because the parents refuse to retrieve them, are unable because they do not have the transportation, or they cannot be located.

Under current statute, when officers attempt to transfer the child to the care of the local Public Children Services Agency (PCSA), we too often encounter procedural resistance. This refusal creates an immediate, severe strain on public safety resources. For instance, in my own city recently:

Our officers located two juveniles at a local hotel who had been abandoned by a friend and had not committed any crime. We were unable to contact their family members to facilitate their safe return. Upon transporting the girls to the local Public Children Services Agency (PCSA), the agency initially refused to take custody, citing administrative policies regarding the immediate availability of placement homes and the documentation of the children's property. This procedural standoff consumed over five hours of police time, during which two of our patrol officers were effectively turned into unauthorized caretakers. This meant those officers were pulled from responding to emergency calls, creating a severe public safety deficit, until persistent administrative engagement ultimately compelled the PCSA to assume its statutory protective duty.

This delay is a critical lapse in public service. When officers are pulled from patrol and placed into a protracted custodial role, they cannot respond to emergencies, fire calls, or critical public safety needs. This practice puts the entire community at risk.

House Bill 532 resolves this ambiguity and resource drain by mandating a clear, unified response protocol:

- The bill ensures that when a child is taken into custody due to welfare concerns and cannot be released to a parent, the local PCSA must take immediate custody. This restores our officers to their primary duty of protecting the public.
- By transferring custody to the PCSA immediately, the child is moved from the confusing environment of a police station, which can escalate behavioral issues and raise the risk of a child attempting to flee, into the hands of trained, professional social workers. This is unequivocally in the best interest of the child.
- The bill establishes a definitive inter-county transfer process, making the residential county's PCSA the *lead agency* while ensuring the immediate safety is addressed by the *local PCSA*.

This bill is not only a crucial measure for law enforcement efficiency; it is an affirmation of our shared commitment to the safety and well-being of Ohio's children. It provides clear statutory authority that eliminates the unacceptable practice of bureaucratic ping-ponging children between counties.

The Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 532 so that law enforcement can focus on law enforcement, and child protective services can focus on child protection.

Thank you for your time and consideration.