



**OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
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**PUBLIC CHILDREN SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF OHIO TESTIMONY**



Ohio House of Representatives  
Finance Committee  
Testimony on HB 64  
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Chairman Ryan, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Driehaus, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about Ohio's child welfare system. My name is Matthew Kurtz, Director of Knox County Job and Family Services and President of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio. I am joined here today by Angela Sausser, Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), who will be available for questions. Formed in 1980, PCSAO is a statewide association of Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for and promotes child welfare program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

A call comes into a Public Children Services Agency (PCSA) in the middle of the night and is screened for possible abuse or neglect. A child protection caseworker on call is informed that she must go out and investigate the situation. As the "first responder" to child safety, the caseworker knocks on a door of a dilapidated apartment. What exists on the other side of the door is what keeps all child protection workers, supervisors, and directors awake every night. One wrong word, one sudden movement, and there could be serious risk to the child, other individuals in the home, or even the caseworker's life. Our child protection caseworkers witness traumatic scenes that many of us will never have to experience nor have lasting images engraved in our memories: cigarette burns all over a child's body; a limp infant who has been shaken to the point of brain damage; a toddler crawling

over drug paraphernalia on the floor; parents screaming threats as their children are being walked out of the home; gunshot holes in the wall above a child's bed. And these are the innocent, vulnerable children we serve on a daily basis.

Public Children Services Agencies also serve as the "last chance" for many children. Seventy percent of children under the age of one are in custody of PCSAs due to their parents' opiate addiction. Some families who have children with significant developmental disabilities such as autism and/or intense behavioral health needs are forced to relinquish custody of their children in order to access treatment, especially residential services that can be paid for through a federal funding stream that only PCSAs can access. These are children who have been expelled from school, who have been kicked out of facilities or denied treatment, and it is unsafe to keep the child at the home any longer. Other youth include those at risk of juvenile justice involvement who are diverted to a PCSA for care. Child welfare is often chosen as it is the system mandated to serve children, ages 0-18, and no other service options in the community exist. In fact, 6 in 10 children in custody of county PCSAs came into care for reasons other than abuse and neglect such as delinquency or behavior problems (mental health and/or developmental disabilities).

If we are going to get serious about moving children in foster care out of our system and into stable, permanent homes, we need to address the multi-system youth who are placed in our system in their teens, then are stuck in residential treatment facilities where they can't learn how to function in families, and finally emancipate or "age out" at 18 or 19 into a world that for too many ensures only poverty and negative outcomes.

PCSAO is pleased with the Governor's proposed Medicaid investments in expanded behavioral health services. If done thoughtfully, it could be beneficial for communities to be able to serve and keep some of the multi-system children out of child welfare, but we also know there will be some youth who have very intense behavioral health needs that require stabilization and cannot be served in their home or community. We commend Governor Kasich for focusing on the need to reduce poverty in Ohio and agree that employment is key to this goal. We believe child welfare can and should play a critical role in reducing poverty. After all, it is simply not enough to lift adults who are currently in

poverty out of their circumstances if we are creating a pipeline of foster youth right behind them who will age out of care and fill their places. Ohio's PCSAs have done significant work on increasing permanency for children in our care. We have many innovative and effective practices mainly supported with local funding and philanthropic investments. Even so, Ohio is currently failing 2 of the 5 federal data indicators for permanency.

Children who do not secure a loving, lifelong permanent family face many challenges when they age out of our child welfare system: a third will be homeless, 36% will be incarcerated, over half will not complete high school, and only 12% will work a full-time job. We also commend the Governor and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services for proposing to maintain the MBR investment of \$3.2 million to match two federal funds that support permanency efforts for reunification and youth emancipating from care.

But even with these proposed investments, child welfare still will require a stronger state investment. Currently, the state's share for child welfare is at 9% compared to 39% federal and 52% local. PCSAs' local funding has been stretched significantly to serve these multi-system children who often require very expensive treatment. Federal funding is always at risk. And without the state restoring its share to at least SFY 2009 levels, obtaining permanency such as guardianship or adoption for children will be very challenging, especially for these complex, multi-system children who often have been lingering in care for several years and most likely not returning home. Ohio is currently 49<sup>th</sup> in the country for state's investment in child welfare. On average, most states contribute 45% of the total funding with only 10% reliance on local funding.

I also want to direct your attention to the proposed elimination of the TPPT, or Tangible Personal Property Tax, "hold-harmless" provision. The TPPT "accelerated phase-out," as some refer to it, will negatively impact many health and human service levies like ours. Across the child welfare system in Ohio, we estimate losses of \$17.5 million in the 2016-2017 biennium and \$29.3 million by SFY2018. This loss compounds the struggles we are describing today. For this reason, we urge you to **continue holding counties harmless for the TPPT phase-out at current levels.**

**PCSAO is requesting \$20 million annually in line 523, State Child Protection Allocation (SCPA),** to restore funding, work to build a foundation of state support for child welfare by increasing its share to 11%, and allow the county PCSAs to focus on improving permanency outcomes that will lead to a reduction in poverty, as fewer of these children will suffer homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment. PCSAO is requesting that the first \$8.8 million of the \$20 million request be allocated equally to all 88 county PCSAs (\$100,000 per county) and the remainder of the funding (\$11.2m) allocated via the SCPA formula. This would allow for a significant investment in some struggling counties and provide a base state investment overall to each county.

To address multi-system youth, PCSAO requests that the Governor and General Assembly convene a time-limited study group to examine the current costs, issues, and outcomes for these youth (juvenile justice, mental health, and developmental disabilities), how the Governor's proposed person-centered case management approaches in Medicaid and ODJFS will impact multi-system youth, and consider if an equitable, adequate, and sustainable system of funding is needed to properly address their needs and not just rely on the child welfare system.

It is time to invest in our first responders, not make child welfare the last resort, and begin to build a foundation at the State for child welfare so to ensure all children are safe with permanent, lifelong families.

Thank you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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Public Children Services Association of Ohio