



Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association

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Joel Potts, Executive Director

The Ohio Senate Finance Committee Testimony

House Bill 64

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding House Bill 64. My name is Joel Potts and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association (OJFSDA.)

There are two significant issues in House Bill 64 which I would like to discuss which would have major repercussions to counties. They include changes to the county Prevention, Retention and Contingency program (PRC) and the Governor's proposal to create a new comprehensive case management program for unemployed and underemployed Ohioans.

Ohio's PRC program was developed in the mid-1990's and is a cornerstone to our local welfare reform program. The program reinvents traditional welfare programs through the reinvestment of welfare dollars at the local level and allows person-centered case managed assistance to prevent dependency through a strategic outcome-focused model.

Under the old/traditional approach to welfare prior to the creation of PRC, counties were limited to the extent to which they could provide the most needed support to their clients. The old system was reactive; responding to the needs of the client after their situation had become drastic. The PRC system is proactive, preventing dependency and strategically intervening when the investment of resources can forestall the potential for long-term welfare reliance. It also permits counties to invest in strategies aimed at meeting clients' needs through community services and helping stabilize families. The PRC program also provides for contingent needs, helping families with one-time urgent problems that could, if left unintended, result in harm to the family.

As proposed in the budget, the state would seize control of much of the PRC program, diverting resources away from local case managers and limit our ability to holistically address the needs of the family. Not only would this impair our ability to serve the needs of the client, it would also have negative impacts to programs and services provided throughout the local JFS system including child protection services, workforce development, transportation, GED-assistance, English as second language, before and after school programs, housing, food assistance and public assistance eligibility work. Depending on the extent of new state mandated services, local Adult Protective Services could be negatively impacted as well.

The budget language included in House Bill 64 would establish a new entitlement program, unfunded, and threaten the operations of every local program administered through the county job and family service system.

A conservative estimate of costs of the proposal as currently structured in the budget; in year one \$17 to \$50 million would be diverted from local county resources and necessary to support the changes. The costs would dramatically increase each year as utilization grows. Not only would these costs be devastating to existing community services, they would also be unsustainable.

The Association is in conversations with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Governor's office, as well as with members of the General Assembly, to develop a plan which would protect local services, avoid the development of a new entitlement program and strengthen the comprehensive case management program. We are especially grateful for the assistance of members of the legislature in recent weeks to address this potential problem.

It is our hope and desire to develop proposals which meet with the state intent without devaluing and damaging the many worthy local programs providing assistance and support to the poorest families of the state. However, in the event an agreed upon plan cannot be developed in the next several days, we urge the Senate to remove the provisions in House Bill 64 pertaining to the PRC program. The removal of these provisions will not negatively affect the plans for a comprehensive case management program and allow time to work on future changes in the PRC program which strengthen, not damage, the program.

House Bill 64 also proposes the development of a new comprehensive case management program for local governments to administer. No one knows the need, or the importance, to streamline, simplify and modernize our system more than the counties in order to better meet the needs of our clients and to improve positive employment outcomes. Local agencies constantly experience the burdens placed on clients and the system by unnecessary bureaucracies and the inflexibility of the system.

We strongly support the goal of addressing poverty through work and support the Governor's efforts to break down silos while simplifying and streamlining services through case management. We know that the best chance most individuals trapped in poverty will have to improve their economic status is through employment. There is much government can do, should do, and needs to do to support work and lift individuals and families out of poverty and to become self-reliant and reduce dependency on government programs.

Comprehensive case management models can achieve positive outcomes for the clients but developing meaningful and successful models will not be easy. The complex nature of many of the families we serve will require multiple government, public and private entities to work together to break down employment barriers. Proper tools will need to be in place to ensure the best opportunity for success.

As we further work on this legislation and the development of a person-centered case management system, there are several issues OJFSDA urges be taken into consideration. They include:

- Authority, responsibility and liability must reside in the same place. HB 64 proposes a new governance structure that could result in local governments being held accountable to yet-to-be identified state mandates without proper funding or authority to prioritize resources or the ability to achieve the necessary outcomes.

- Technology will be a critical component to success. Case managers will need access to multiple eligibility systems in order to provide comprehensive case management. Currently, I.T. systems within JFS do not talk to each other.
- Ideally, I.T. systems should be integrated but at a minimum, systems must be accessible to both the client and the case manager.
- Focusing on 16-24 year olds is the right place to start. Often these individuals have multiple barriers; including education, low job skills, housing, transportation, behavioral health, felony records, medication dependency, etc.
- Counties need to be provided time to develop systems starting with this population and once a program is developed and functioning, pursue expanding the mandated population.
- Local governments need realistic time frames to develop strategies, build capacity, train workers and establish metrics and measure performance before expanding to the full JFS eligible population.
- Successful case management will require local flexibility and personal responsibility.
- Successful strategies to reduce poverty will take time and success will often be achieved through incremental steps.

Once these issues have been addressed, county governments will be in the best position to help residents enter the workforce, improve the economic circumstances of the family and reduce dependency on government programs.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to working with you to finalize a budget which meets the needs of the citizens we serve.