



Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association

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Joel Potts, Executive Director

Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

House Bill 49

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March 22, 2017

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding House Bill 49. My name is Joel Potts and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association.

County departments of job and family services (CDJFS) agencies administer one of the largest health, human service and workforce systems in the nation. One in four Ohioans depend on the local JFS system to help meet basic needs including healthcare and food, improve job opportunities, collect child support, escape poverty and be safe. Through smart investments of federal, state and local resources, Ohio will continue to improve our services to protect our most vulnerable citizens, help individuals reduce dependency on public assistance programs and improve the economy.

Systems operated through the local agencies include cash assistance, food assistance, childcare, Medicaid (including long-term care, children's health insurance and services to aged, blind and disabled), adoption, adult protective services, child protective services, foster care, refugee services, local workforce initiatives and child support programs.

The growing opiate epidemic is putting unparalleled pressure on the protective services system. In recent years Ohio has invested heavily in treatment, awareness, education, law enforcement and community support services. But in one extremely important area in the opiate battle, the State is failing to partner with counties in the mission to protect and serve the children in drug addicted households. We are also seeing similar parallels in adult protective services.

County agencies are on the front line, struggling to ensure child and senior safety and well-being. We are bearing the brunt of the opiate surge in the household with little to no help from the state for this vital protection system. Local governments already heavily invest in children services, leading the nation for support, but help is needed. Therefore we are requesting a significant new investment in child protection to enhance local funds already being utilized to fight the opiate crisis. We are also requesting additional funding to continue to build a strong foundation for Ohio's adult protective services system.

Along with our request for additional resources, Medicaid expansion has been critical in ensuring that local communities can fund necessary rehabilitation treatment for addicted parents and caregivers. We respectfully request that as the legislature wrestles with public policy decisions around Medicaid coverage for adults, you prioritize the ability to serve these vulnerable populations.

The following budget recommendations from the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association would significantly increase our ability to protect the invisible

victims of the opiate crisis. Some of these recommendations would not require an increase in general revenue funds.

OJFSDA Budget Requests to Address the Opiate Crisis Include:

Keeping children safe: Child Protective Services – Increase Investment by \$30 Million per year

In Ohio, half of all children taken into protective custody last year had parental drug use identified at the time of removal. Among the infants in care, 70% are there due to their parents' opiate addiction. Families who abuse opiates consume the most child-protection resources. The amount of casework necessary for PCSA's in opiate households is often both far more complex and time-consuming. These cases also remain open much longer than in non-opiate related cases. The increase in drug-related cases requires more foster care placements, kinship services, treatment for children who may have substance problems themselves and resources for the trauma and other behavioral health issues suffered by children in drug addicted homes.

Additional resources will ensure caseworkers can invest the time these cases require to deliver quality core casework services, and help guarantee appropriate placement options to safeguard the health and safety of the innocent victims of Ohio's still-growing opiate epidemic. Furthermore, increases in state funding will also leverage additional federal funding with a \$0.62 match for every dollar invested in eligible foster care placements.

Increase the Number of Kinship Caregivers by Expanding Eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care (\$10 million annual investment of TANF resources)

When a child needs to be removed from his or her home due to unsafe conditions or neglect, children services workers first check to see if there is a suitable extended family member, or kin, to care for the child. Kinship placements are less traumatic for the child than being placed with an unfamiliar family or in an unfamiliar community. Kinship placements are more stable while permanency options are explored and less expensive than foster home placements.

One of the most significant barriers counties encounter while exploring potential kin placements is the cost kinship caregivers face in taking on the obligation of financing child care for the wards they have brought into their home. To help provide quality care for children in crisis and reduce costs to the overall child protective services system, OJFSDA recommends kinship caregivers be allowed to access publicly funded child care regardless of income. Such an investment and policy change would enhance the number of kinship caregivers and therefore improve outcomes for children while decreasing the costs to foster care and the child protective services system.

Adult Protective Services – Increase Investment by \$10 Million

The state and counties are actively engaged in a major restructuring of the Adult Protective Services program as a result of changes being implemented from the last biennial budget. Due to this statewide effort, counties have experienced an increased number of reports of suspected elder abuse. In addition, the scourge of opiates is also impacting the senior population of the state with increased exploitation of the elderly.

The elder population is projected to continue to increase, with 25% of Ohio's population in 2030 expected to be comprised of adults over the age of 65, up from 14% today. Currently counties receive \$30,000 per year in state adult protective services funding. This does not cover even one full-time caseworker in each county. We propose increasing the current \$2.64 Million/year appropriation to \$65,000 per county, or a total of \$5.72 Million annually statewide. This would provide each county with at least one FTE dedicated to adult protective services and ensure some capacity at the local level to investigate alleged elder abuse. The remainder of a \$10

Million/year appropriation could be distributed via formula to the counties in order to help fund necessary protective services or casework functions.

Other Budget Considerations

Child Support

Investing in Ohio's child support program is extremely cost effective, lifts children out of poverty, reduces dependency on public assistance programs and supports families. Families receiving welfare benefits will leave the program almost twice as fast as cases where no child support order is established or collections are made. There are over one-million children in Ohio needing support and local child support enforcement agencies successfully collect over \$1.7 billion a year for these families.

Ohio's program is a national model, collecting \$8.25 for every dollar invested: thirty-three percent above the national average. That means even a modest investment in the child support program of \$4 million would result in \$100 million to the children and families of the state.

Even without a General Revenue Investment there are many things the legislature can do to support the child support program, alleviating costs to counties, increase efficiencies, speed up services and enhance collections. In the coming months we plan to present legislation which would update Ohio's child support guidelines and also provide technical fixes to the state's administrative process. Your support of these measures would significantly improve Ohio's program and we will be providing further details soon.

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NET)

County job and family services agencies are concerned with proposed budget language which would transition responsibility for the Non-Emergency Transportation (NET) system from a county-based system to a state-led brokerage model in July 2018. County agencies and local communities are heavily vested in this program and changes in NET operations could have serious and significant unintended consequences on clients and community transportation systems. Little information is available on the state plans and OJFSDA will be working with the Administration and legislature throughout the budget process to ensure any changes to NET enhance, and do not hamper, transportation services already in place throughout the state.

Conclusion

I recognize our requests for additional funding to address the opiate crisis is a big ask of the state. However, it is a huge ask and unrealistic expectation that local governments can continue to bear the impact of the opiate crisis to the children, parents, grandparents, kin, and foster parents alone. A generation of children and our communities are at risk and we need your help.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, 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.