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Senate Finance

June 6, 2017

Testimony of Amy Roehrenbeck, Esq., Executive Director, Ohio CSEA Directors' Association HB49

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on HB49. My name is Amy Roehrenbeck, and I am the Executive Director for the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association (OCDA). OCDA is a membership organization of county child support enforcement agencies (CSEAs), dedicated to strengthening Ohio's child support program.

Nationally, the child support program includes one in every five children, but in Ohio, that number is one in every three. Our program not only serves large numbers of children, but we also serve them for long periods of time, often from infancy to emancipation, and beyond. We have the 5th largest caseload in the country, with roughly 941,000 cases, and we provide services to families of all types, from divorcing parents, to unmarried parents, to caretaker relatives, and others. The child support program encourages responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency, and child well-being by providing services to locate parents, establish parentage, establish child support and medical support orders, collect support, modify orders when circumstances have changed, and enforce orders that are not being paid.

Through Federal Financial Participation, counties are able to draw down two federal dollars for every local dollar spent. Our state allocation (line 600502) has been flat-funded at \$23.8 million since FY13. In the House passed version of the budget, however, we took a 1.5% cut to our state match allocation, resulting in a 4.5% cut to our spending capabilities for the child support program. Every dollar of our state match allocation gets spent by the counties each year, and this line item is critical to the program and its success.

The child support program is a highly cost-effective program. For every dollar spent on our program, we collect \$8.25 in child support (much higher than the national average of \$5.33). We also reduce government costs in other public welfare programs, through cost recovery and cost avoidance. In FFY16, we collected almost \$1.7 billion dollars, and returned \$23.3 million to the state in assistance reimbursement, and \$19.7 million to reimburse Medicaid. Any cut to our state

match could affect our collections, our services to families, and our cost effectiveness. Continued investment in our program makes financial sense.

We are working to modernize our child support program to better serve families and provide efficient, streamlined case processing. We ask for your support and assistance with the following:

- First, we ask for your consideration in restoring our state match allocation line item, 600502, to \$23.8m. As noted above, the 1.5% cut proposed in the House version of the budget means a 4.5% cut to our spending ability for the program. Restoration would take us back to being flat-funded at our previous level of \$23.8m.
- Second, we ask for your consideration in providing funding to update our technology. Our statewide Support Enforcement Tracking System, SETS, is 20 years old. SETS is an outdated mainframe system with a COBOL programming base. It works well to process payments, but does not work well as a daily case management system, and it does not integrate well with other JFS automated systems. We need serious upgrades to our system to provide tools that can benefit all CSEAs in administering our large volume of cases. We currently rely on manual work-arounds and outside databases to work our cases effectively. We also support the creation of a mobile application to make it easier for our program participants to communicate with us, and expansion efforts for our Child Support Web Portal.
- Next, we have two major pieces of legislation that are priorities for us. The first is SB70, which was introduced in February of this year by Senator Coley, and is a non-controversial bill to tweak and streamline our administrative processes. These processes are a cornerstone of our program, allowing us to use a quasi-judicial process to provide cost-free services to families to establish paternity, child support and medical support, as well as modify and enforce orders, and terminate orders. This frees up court dockets, saving their time for cases that are more complex or contested. We use these processes every day, but since they have been piecemealed through legislation over time, there are inconsistencies and loopholes that need to be addressed. Passing SB70 will create better consistency county to county, streamline the processes for families, and increase efficiencies for our CSEAs, while not affecting the substantive rights of the parties. SB70 is the same as SB308, which was passed unanimously out of the Senate during the 131st General Assembly, and passed unanimously out of committee in the House during lame duck, before failing to reach the House floor for a vote. Many of recommendations in this bill have been needed since 2002, and it is time to modernize our administrative processes by passing SB70.

The second major piece of legislation is SB125, introduced by Senator Beagle. SB125 addresses the numbers, methodology, and manner by which we set child support orders in Ohio. Our child support tables and calculation worksheets are in the Revised Code, and therefore need legislative action to update them. Our tables are a quarter of a century old now, and are based on economic data from the 1980s. Our current methodology does not adequately address the self-sufficiency needs of low income parents, which often results in orders that are beyond their ability to comply. Child support orders for middle to higher

income levels are not accurately reflecting what it costs to raise a child and need to be adjusted upward. Additional adjustments need made with regard to cash medical support, health insurance responsibility, daycare credit, and multiple family issues. This legislation is a critical and necessary modernization of our guidelines. This update also allows us to move the guideline tables and worksheets to the Ohio Administrative Code, so that they can be subject to five-year rule review, and we can make adjustments in a timely manner based on economics, family structures, and other changes. We also have recent final federal regulations that will require these changes in our program.

- Finally, we ask for continued flexibility in funding for local counties. As I noted above, any additional dollar invested in the child support program locally enables us to draw down two from the Feds. Flexibility allows dollars to be moved between programs, based on local discretion and need. This flexibility has been critical for some CSEAs to stay afloat, absent any new investment in the program.

Ohio's child support program is a highly cost-effective, efficient, and steadfast program. Thank you for your continued investment in our program, and for support of legislation that positively impacts the work we do for over a million children in Ohio. I appreciate your time today and am happy to answer any questions you may have.