



Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Testimony on Sub. H.B. 49
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Good morning Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Sub. H.B. 49. My name is Angela Sausser and I am the Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), a statewide association of Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies.

I am here today to talk about the crisis facing Ohio's children services system due to the opioid epidemic. Children services agencies' ability to provide essential services to Ohio's vulnerable children – the innocent victims of the epidemic – is at risk.

This is not an easy issue to face. Many of us, including myself, would prefer to not have to consider the headlines and stories associated with this crisis—too many children are exposed to horrific circumstances, unspeakable trauma and abuse. Unfortunately, just last week, the Columbus Dispatch confirmed what we all suspected, that this crisis is not going to slow down anytime soon. Opioid deaths in Ohio hit at least 4,100 in 2016, a 36% increase over the previous year.

The impact of the opioid epidemic reverberates through every stage of the children services system and creates a snowball effect:

- It starts with more children in foster care: an 11% increase since 2010
- These children are staying in care longer because of relapsing parents: the length of stay in temporary custody (foster care) has increased by 19% since 2010
- This in turn affects the availability of foster caregivers

- And places stress on kinship care providers struggling to meet the children's needs with very little support
- Caseworkers become frustrated with the lack of progress on cases and the secondary trauma of telling children that their parents have overdosed, ultimately leading to high turnover: 1 out of 7 left in 2016, costing our agencies \$24.3m to replace
- And all of this equates to an increased cost draining agency budgets: annual placement costs have increased by 20% --that is \$55 million dollars ---in just 3 years

Ohio's children services system has received no new state funding to address this epidemic and the surge in cases. In fact, state funds for county children services agencies were cut 21% in 2009 and have been flat funded since 2010. Ohio continues to be 50th in the nation for the State's share (10%) of public children services expenditures.

My message is straightforward:

- 1) Please maintain the \$15 million per year in additional dollars that were included in Sub. H.B. 49 for children services and move this investment from Line 600533 to Line 600523.
- 2) Please find a way to add another \$15 million per year to that investment, knowing that the opioid crisis is not slowing down and children services must be able to respond and protect these children. We cannot get to a point where caseworkers are concerned about costs when deciding whether to remove a child from a dangerous situation.
- 3) If additional funding cannot be secured, then restore all the children services funding line items to 100% as any cut to our line items negatively impacts our county public children services agencies' ability to protect children.
- 4) Maintain the \$10 million per year earmark in the TANF block grant to establish a kinship caregiver child care program – designed to help keep children within families and out of the foster care system.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.