

June 7, 2017:
Interested Party Testimony on HB 49



Good Morning Chairman Oeslager and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 49.

I serve as the Legislative Advocacy Co-Chair for the Central Ohio Rescue and Restore Coalition (CORRC). CORRC is a central Ohio network of organizations fighting human trafficking in different roles and different sectors. Our members include social service agencies that provide services directly to human trafficking survivors; local law enforcement agencies that investigate and prosecute traffickers; and community organizations and churches striving to raise awareness about this devastating crime. Our mission is to provide a collaborative, comprehensive community response to human trafficking in central Ohio through education, services, advocacy, and prosecution. (You can find out more about our work at www.centralohiorescueandrestore.org.)

Human trafficking is a horrific crime where someone is induced to perform labor or sex work through force, fraud, or coercion for someone else's gain. Since CORRC was founded ten years ago, we have served men, women, and children from diverse backgrounds and who were trafficked in central Ohio in a myriad of different ways. All had one thing in common: traffickers found a vulnerability and used it to exploit these individuals. The most common vulnerability we see? People suffering from drug addiction and children struggling in our foster care system without a stable home. Unfortunately, those two often go hand in hand.

While many provisions of the proposed operating budget will impact human trafficking victims and survivors across the state of Ohio, today I would like to focus specifically on the provision regarding funding for foster care services. Namely, the proposed increase in funding to train, retain, and recruit foster caregivers.¹ Earlier this year, the House Subcommittee on Health and Human Services and this Senate Finance Committee received thorough testimony from the Public Children Services Association of Ohio and their partners, detailing how the heroin epidemic has strained our foster care system and endangered Ohio's children.²

In our work serving sex trafficking survivors, we have seen traffickers use heroin to control and subjugate the victims they force into sex work and we have seen traffickers target and recruit children into sex work who have histories of neglect and abuse and have been unsuccessful in foster care. After years in this work, I am now personally observing how sex trafficking can become generational. I have personally worked with incredible young women, barely out of their teen years, who grew up in foster care and are now struggling to maintain custody of their own children. Many of these women have described to me how pimps used drugs to control their mothers and force their mothers into sex work, and, as a result,

¹ PCSAO. "PCSAO thanks House leaders for \$30 million investment in child protection." (April 25, 2017).

<http://www.pcsao.org/news/66>

² PCSAO Testimony on HB 49. (May 17, 2017). <http://www.pcsao.org/pdf/advocacy/SenateFinanceTestimony5-17.pdf> ;

Children Services Testimony on HB 49. (March 16, 2017). <http://www.pcsao.org/pdf/advocacy/BudgetPanelTestimony3-16-17.pdf>

how they spent their childhoods shuffled from foster home to foster home. Their foster caregivers often did not have the training, support, or commitment necessary to help them sort through their complex trauma and mental health issues. Once these young women found themselves homeless and exploited by these pimps and drug dealers too, their children are placed in foster care as well. The system begins anew.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children notes that 1 in 6 runaways are at a high risk to be sex trafficked, and that 86% of those likely sex trafficking victims were in the care of social services or foster care when they went missing.³ Ohio's own Senator Rob Portman has commented on the high risks of trafficking for children in foster care,⁴ and national FBI sex-trafficking stings illustrate the link between foster care and sex trafficking.⁵ The heroin epidemic has only aggravated the issue, leaving many more children in foster care and vulnerable to traffickers. In the most extreme cases, we have seen children trafficked directly to heroin dealers by their addicted parents. In 2016, a Hamilton County mother was sentenced to 51 years for pimping her 11-year-old daughter to her heroin dealer here in Ohio.⁶ The weight of addressing these horrors and rehabilitating these children fall to the heavy shoulders of our child services agencies and foster caregivers.

Our foster care system plays a crucial role in both responding to and in preventing human trafficking in Ohio. The agencies working in our foster care system need additional funding to continue their critical work. More resources must be allocated toward recruiting foster caregivers motivated and determined to stick with these children through their complex trauma, mental health, and behavioral issues. More resources must be allocated toward training foster caregivers on these complicated issues, so they are empowered to prevent these children from falling prey to the same demons that took their parents from them. More resources must be allocated toward supporting foster caregivers through their instrumental and challenging work helping these children to break the cycle.

Thank you for taking the time to seek out the experiences of those on the ground who are doing the day-to-day work to address our state's multifaceted challenges. We appreciate your support and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

In Solidarity,

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³ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2014). <http://www.missingkids.com/1in6>

⁴ Portman Highlights Risk of Trafficking for Kids in Foster Care. (August 4, 2015).

<https://www.portman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=F37F4196-9065-4C3C-95BC-7BE77BD94B8F>

⁵ Koseff, Alexei, Los Angeles Times. "Sex-trafficking sting highlights vulnerability of foster children." (July 29, 2013).

<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jul/29/nation/la-na-child-sex-20130730>

⁶ Collman, Ashley, Daily Mail. "Mother sentenced to 51 years in prison for pimping her 11-year-old daughter out to her drug dealer in exchange for heroin and then forcing the girl to take opioid as a 'reward.'" (July 20, 2016).

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3699566/Mother-sentenced-51-years-prison-pimping-11-year-old-daughter-drug-dealer-exchange-heroin-forcing-girl-opioid-reward.html>