



Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Testimony on Sub. H.B. 49  
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Good morning Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairwoman 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 (PCS AO), a statewide association of Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies.

As you know, Ohio's children services system is in crisis due to the opioid epidemic. Our ability to provide essential services to Ohio's vulnerable children – the innocent victims of the epidemic – is at risk. According to ODJFS, the county children services agencies spent \$138 million last year in foster care placement costs (42% of total placement costs) for children impacted by their parents' substance abuse.

As we have testified before this Committee previously, the epidemic's main impact on children services is three-fold:

- Increased placement costs due to the need for more intensive treatment for children who have experienced trauma. Statewide, these out-of-home costs have increased by 20% --that is \$55 million ---in just 3 years.
- More children entering foster care and staying in foster care longer due to parents relapsing and overdosing. The average length of stay in temporary custody has increased by 19% -- to 240 days—over the last 6 years.
- A growing shortage of foster parents to take care of children when their parents cannot.

We appreciate the Senate's efforts to address Ohio's opioid epidemic by dedicating \$176 million per year, including \$15 million per year of new resources for children services agencies.

However, shifting the funding source from GRF to TANF for this new investment of \$15M per year means that we have essentially lost the ability to respond to the opioid epidemic, putting more children at risk. That is because TANF dollars come with many restrictions that will not allow us to address the key impacts I just listed.

More specifically, TANF cannot be used for 1) foster care placement costs; 2) treatment services; 3) for families whose children are in custody for longer than six months; or 4) as match to draw down other federal funds.

To make sure that this critical investment can do what is intended --- help the children services system respond to the opioid epidemic-- we request that the Senate restore the \$15 million per year to GRF and place these funds in line item 600523, where the State Child Protection Allocation for public children services agencies is included. With these new GRF dollars, county children services agencies will be able to leverage between \$6-\$9 million in additional federal Title IV-E dollars and address rising foster care placement costs, continue to provide treatment services to children who are staying in foster care longer, and recruit more foster parents.

We appreciate the increase to \$15M per year in TANF set-aside funds to provide kinship caregiver child care support. This specific purpose is a good fit for TANF funds and will 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.