



Ohio Children's Alliance

Leading change for child and family service providers

Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

October 14, 2019

Proponent Testimony on HB 8

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 8.

My name is Mark Mecum; I am the CEO of the Ohio Children's Alliance. Founded in 1973 as Ohio's first statewide child advocacy organization, the Ohio Children's Alliance provides leadership for Ohio's at-risk children, families, and community agencies. Our membership is composed of over 75 agencies throughout Ohio that provide foster care and behavioral health services to over 100,000 children and family members each year.

The bill before you today, Amended House Bill 8, is an essential part of our state's response to the Opiate crisis. The bill has the full support of our association and we commend joint sponsors Manchester and Galonski, co-sponsors, and this committee, for their leadership.

As you know, the Opiate crisis has caused unprecedented strain on families and communities across our state. Child abuse and neglect investigations are occurring at high rates. Record amounts of children are entering child protective services custody and removed from their parents care. These children need loving homes so that they can continue growing up and heal from the effects of trauma.

When kin, such as grandparents, are not available to care for these children, we rely on our state's network of trained, licensed, and approved foster caregivers. Foster caregivers are heroes in our communities, and sadly, we do not have enough of them. There are many aggressive efforts underway to grow our foster home capacity, but despite these efforts, we have a massive shortage today. There are about 7,500 licensed foster homes in Ohio, and approximately 16,000 children in child protective services custody.

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We must think outside the box to attract more families and improve the speed in which they can be trained, licensed, and approved. HB 8 would do just that.

HB 8 would remove the minimum initial and ongoing training hour amounts for foster caregivers from the Revised Code, thereby permitting the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to re-design the training program and set new minimum hour amounts in the Administrative Code.

With this authority, we are confident ODJFS would promulgate rules to re-structure Ohio's foster care training program so that foster caregivers can become licensed faster, but still receive all the training courses they need within a few months of being licensed. We are also confident that these changes to our foster care system would result in Ohio maintaining a top-notch training program and a network of high-quality foster homes.

It's important to point out that the goals of this legislation are consistent with recommendations produced by the General Assembly's Foster Care Advisory Group during 2018 which I co-chaired. That committee recognized that Ohio must take a multi-pronged approach to addressing the challenges in our foster care system. HB 8 is a critical piece of this approach and we strongly support it.

We would also ask you to support the inclusion of an amendment, AM XXX. It would allow The Department to compensate agencies for foster caregiver training they require above the minimum legal requirements. The Department may choose not to approve any form of compensation for this training, but it would be a tool in their toolbox to incentivize high quality training and foster care homes.

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

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