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## HB 226 proponent testimony

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Good morning, Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Sweringen, Ranking Member Leland, Joint Sponsors, Representative Miller and Representative Pavilga, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I am pleased to be able to spend time with you this morning, in what is a critical gap in our law which is easily remedied with the bipartisan support of this committee and Representatives Miller and Pavilga. As a lifelong Republican, nothing pleases me more than work on both sides of the aisle that achieves good law and protections to the citizens of the great State of Ohio. HB 226 does just this.

I have been licensed to practice law for twenty years. My practice is focused exclusively on domestic relations and child custody matters. Before and during law school I was employed full time by Franklin County Children Services as a lead investigator in child abuse and neglect cases. I became intimately familiar with the risk and dangers that our most vulnerable citizens, face in our communities, often times in the care of their own family members or friends. I have not wavered in my belief that it is incumbent upon the systems and dedicated professionals that I have come to know in my experience to do all that is within their abilities to give those systems all the tools they need to be effective in doing so.

When I became aware of the gap in the law that does not provide needed protections to GAL's and CASA's, I knew I could be helpful in making that change. I approached Representative Miller, who I know and trust, to help formulate change. We are here today as a result of a joint effort of dedicated professionals approaching you this morning to share in that view.

The field of domestic relations law can be one of the most difficult areas in the law in which to practice. Burn out is high, client demands are often times extraordinary

and sometimes it does not seem like there are enough hours in the day to do all that needs to be done in a case. I have the good fortune of working with a team at Taft who is dedicated, passionate and lead by my friend and mentor, Gene Lewis, with over 40 years of experience. But all that, without good GAL's working within that same group, can make being successful in the protection of children's best interest impossible.

I know Delilah Nunez, who the Committee heard from this morning, well. She served as a law clerk in my firm and I have seen her work first hand as a GAL in cases which I served as counsel. When I became aware of the difficulties and stressors she had been facing as a GAL, I knew the law needed to be updated to effectively combat these kinds of occurrences from repeating in the future. Sadly, what she faces, as testified to by Magistrate Sieloff, is not new. The bottom line is this: if GAL's and CASA's are threatened, intimidated or made to feel uneasy in the performance of their Court mandated, duties it's really the children who suffer most. Having an effective representative is key to clearly articulating to the Court what a vulnerable child may be dealing with in a custodial or abuse/neglect/dependency action. The Judge or Magistrate cannot independently walk off the bench and learn these things on his or her own-they must rely on the GAL's to be their eyes and ears and report unbiasedly to the Court their findings and their recommendations. Threats of harm have no place in that equation. This bill validates that concern and sends a clear message that mistreatment of those who are serving will not be tolerated.

I encourage your support of this important measure to take this step forward in making our Court system well equipped to handle these matters and provide for the necessary safe guards to do so. I welcome questions.

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