



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee

Paul Pfeifer

Proponent Testimony on Substitute House Bill 4

May 13, 2021

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to proponent testimony on Substitute House Bill 4 on behalf of the Ohio Judicial Conference. I am Paul Pfeifer, Executive Director of the Judicial Conference.

The OJC recently submitted interested party testimony on the as-introduced version of H.B. 4. We offered two suggestions for how the bill could be improved. We proposed maintaining the bill's requirement that all abuse reports are submitted to law enforcement while creating a procedure to determine which negligence cases are most urgent and require that those reports are conveyed to law enforcement. We also suggest modifying the bill to require biennial memorandum of understanding renewal and review. Both of these suggestions have been incorporated into Substitute H.B. 4.

Additionally, Sub. H.B. 4 contains the "Affidavit for Access" proposal our Juvenile Law & Procedure Committee has developed with the Public Children Services Association of Ohio. This proposal would create a new R.C. 2151.25 to allow a juvenile court to have discretion to consider an affidavit from Children Services when a child's parent, guardian or custodian are obstructing access to the child, and there are allegations of abuse, neglect or dependency that do not yet arise to the level of filing an official complaint with the court. The court will determine whether there is probable cause to allow Children Services to have timely access to interview the child and determine whether the allegations have a factual basis. This would not only allow Children Services to quickly determine whether a child is facing actual harm, but will also allow Children Services screen out the case and redirect their resources if the allegations are unfounded.

We thank you for the opportunity to update our testimony for Sub. H.B. 4. We also thank the sponsors, Representative Manchester and Representative Plummer, for being open to our suggestions and incorporating them into the bill. We are happy to continue working on the bill if any further improvements are needed. Although I am unavailable to testify in-person, I can follow-up on any questions you may have.