

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to proponent testimony for HB4.

My name is Teri DeVoe and first and foremost I am a licensed foster parent in Fairfield County Ohio I have been licensed since October of 2012 and have fostered over 20 children ages 0- 18. In that process we also adopted 2 sons, one shortly before his 19th birthday and one just after his second birthday.

In November of 2019 I also had the great honor of being appointed to the Governors Children Services Transformation Advisory Council.

During that time, I had the opportunity to travel to southwestern Ohio, and attend two meetings in central Ohio in person. I was also able to review both written and verbal testimony from others across the state who had been touched by the Child Welfare System. The feedback we heard from foster youth, foster parents and other stakeholders was loud and clear. The need to establish a state level ombudsman to act as an independent entity for the investigation and resolution of concerns made by or on behalf of children and families involved with public children's services agencies and private provider agencies that administer or oversee foster care or placement for the children services system.

It is important that this entity is able to encompass several key priorities. It must be a neutral , impartial and independent.

It should have authority and access to the necessary and appropriate records to make the best decision for all parties involved.

It should be collaborative in all aspects. There are many voices who need to be included when it comes to the child welfare system. ; It is important that there us accountability within this office, and that the office will have a focus on outreach and advocacy to the community.

There is a level of accountability that is extremely important, as they should not just listen and hear the needs and issues of youth and families, but be able to make systemic changes and improvements.

There is a crisis , and its important that there are proper supports put into place so that families and youth are supported before , during and after foster care.