



Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 239 House State and Local Government

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Presented by:

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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 239.

My name is Pam Priddy and I am the Chief Strategy Officer for Necco. Necco is a foster care, independent living, residential and behavioral health company founded in 1996. In addition, Necco provides services to young adults that have aged out of foster care and are transitioning into adulthood through independent living programs. While Necco is headquartered in Cincinnati, they also operate throughout all of Ohio, Georgia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. To date, Necco has built over 25,000 families and completed over 5,000 adoptions.

We also have a sixty (60) bed residential facility, The Necco Center, located in Pedro, Ohio in Lawrence County. The Necco Center provides foster care for boys ages 9-22 with an intellectual delay and a dual diagnosis. All total, Necco Ohio includes 400 dedicated employees, and serves over 250 foster families, nearly 400 foster youth, over 1,000 outpatient children and families, and nearly sixty (60) youth at The Necco Center at any given time. Necco is a member of the Ohio Children's Alliance, a statewide child advocacy organization, which is also supportive of Senate Bill 239.

My colleague, Jessica Parks, previously testified before this committee in support of the companion bill, House Bill 442, sponsored by Representative Stephens and Representative Ray. Thank you for passing House Bill 442 out of this committee in November 2021. House Bill 442 is currently pending in the Senate Health Committee.

This bill, Senate Bill 239, was introduced as the companion to House Bill 442. In the Senate Health Committee several changes were made to Senate Bill 239, to include:

1. Removing the provisions allowing Home Assessors employed by private agencies, like Necco, to hire individuals with a bachelor's degree because this change was included in House Bill 4 and no longer needed in this bill;
2. Defining the specific areas of training we are required to provide our professional treatment staff (such as assessing child safety, recognizing child abuse, etc.);
3. Requiring the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) to review and approve private agency training programs within 60 days; and,
4. Requiring ODJFS to work with private agencies to establish a comprehensive, competency-based professional treatment staff training program.

Senate Bill 239 passed out of the Senate unanimously on March 2nd. It is important that we pass this bill immediately because Necco, as well as the other foster care agencies, are experiencing critical staffing shortages that directly impact the number of foster homes we can open each month and strains our ability to provide timely services and treatment to children. We struggle to find and hire the staff to open foster homes and provide rehabilitation services, counseling, and other core services. Today, we have over 40 open positions in Ohio at Necco. One major





factor contributing to our struggle to hire for these positions is that current law limits who Necco, as a private foster care agency, can hire as “professional treatment staff”. The changes in Senate Bill 239 will help us tremendously because it expands the individuals qualified to perform these jobs and creates parity with the requirements in law for those same staff employed by a public agency.

Professional treatment staff employed by both public and private foster care agencies do the same job providing rehabilitative services, home studies, clinical directions, and supervising treatment of children in specialized foster homes. However, the educational, licensure, and training requirements are different for staff hired at a private foster care agency, such as Necco, compared to a public foster care agency. The more restrictive requirements for private agencies puts Necco at a disadvantage when recruiting professional treatment staff. Senate Bill 239 removes the licensure requirement for individuals employed by private agencies and requires the same education requirements and employment experience as is required for individuals employed by public agencies. When Senate Bill 239 becomes law, both public and private professional treatment staff will be subject to the same educational and/or experience requirements.

The provisions contained in Senate Bill 239 will bring Ohio’s law in line with surrounding states such as Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, Indiana, and Michigan. Creating parity among not only private and public agencies, but also among our neighboring states, will help us compete for employees who often cross into a border state for a job.

Chairman Wiggam and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of this important legislation. It is vital that we pass Senate Bill 239 quickly as Ohio continues to see a near record number of children entering foster care and foster care agencies are struggling to hire staff to fill vacant positions and keep up with demand.

I am happy to answer any questions.

