

Louis W. Blessing III

State Senator
8th Senate District
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8068



Committees

Ways & Means, *Chairman*
Primary & Secondary Education,
Vice Chair
Finance
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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 239.

Like most industries across the country, adoption and foster care agencies are struggling to find employees to carry out services. The state of Ohio has many children in need of homes. This was already a problem, but the pandemic has exacerbated this crisis. SB 239 was introduced to help alleviate some staffing issues.

The first thing the bill does is expand who is eligible to perform adoption and foster care home assessments. Home Assessors are a crucial piece of the child service puzzle, because they are the ones that meet with prospective families and determine if they can provide a safe and appropriate environment for children in foster care or adoption. Currently, social workers, counselors and therapists, students of certain behavioral science programs, and employees of public children services agencies can do this work. SB 239 expands eligibility to those with bachelor's degrees in various human services fields. Home assessments are vital and should be handled with care, and the people with this education will aptly carry out this task. The hopeful additional benefit to expanding the pool of candidates for this position will allow the more specialized and experienced therapists, counselors, and social workers to focus more time and effort on their work with children.

The second thing SB 239 seeks to do is create parity between public and private foster care agencies when hiring professional treatment staff. Even though these staff members are hired to do the same work, such as rehabilitative services, home studies, clinical directions, and supervising treatment of children, the education and licensure requirements differ between public and private agencies. SB 239 removes the licensure

requirement for people employed at private agencies and requires the same education by those at public agencies.

Now more than ever, there is a critical need to support children and families navigating adoption and fostering. The pandemic has only increased the stress on the system, and SB 239 aims to alleviate some of the workforce woes that hinder the ability to get Ohio's children into safe homes.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 239. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.