

**Interested Party Testimony**  
**SB 239**  
**Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection**  
**Betsie Norris, Executive Director**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit Interested Party testimony on SB 239. I regret not being able to offer the testimony in person, but appreciate your consideration of our thoughts.

Adoption Network Cleveland (ANC) is a non-profit organization whose goals are to advocate, educate and support those who are impacted by adoption and foster care. We are not a placement agency. ANC works closely with birth families, adoptive families and adoptees themselves throughout the lifelong journey of foster care and adoption.

As a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advocate for better adoption policy, educate Ohioans about adoption and foster care, and support the numerous individuals whose lives are affected by adoption, Adoption Network Cleveland is concerned about the reduction in professional requirements for Adoption Assessors as proposed in SB 239.

One concern is that the proposed reduction in professional degree and licensure requirements is taking place on the heels of Adoption Assessor training hours being cut approximately in half. The robust Adoption Assessor training program which has served to educate our child welfare workforce in both public and private agency settings over the last 25 years has been structured in three tiers of training. Through this year the first and second tiers have offered 36 hours each (72 hours total) of training on fundamental topics related to the direct work needed to be carried out by these professionals with families to promote safety, stability and permanency for Ohio's children and youth. These training hours, starting January 2022, are being cut roughly in half.

Another related issue is that the training hours that prospective foster and adoptive parents receive were also recently cut, by approximately two thirds. This was done to address the shortage of foster parents.

We are concerned that the cumulative result of decreasing licensure standards, decreasing professional training and decreasing parent training all within the context of 2-3 years has the potential to erode the care that Ohio children in need of child welfare services and permanency receive, resulting in a potential negative impact on outcomes for Ohio's most vulnerable youth. Loosening the kind of experience and licensure needed to make sure homes are safe and suitable for youth in foster care should not be the answer.

We suggest that rather than lowering the bar to recruit more workers, Ohio consider ways to increase the pool of available and interested social workers through initiatives to attract students to the needed degree fields and implementing greater rewards for the work.

While we understand the need to remedy labor shortages, we encourage Ohio to look at the big picture and seek solutions that will enhance rather than potentially erode child welfare outcomes.

Thank you for considering my testimony as you consider SB 239.