



Ohio Children's Alliance

Leading change for child and family service providers

March 2, 2022

Ohio Children's Alliance Proponent Testimony on SB 239

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today regarding Senate Bill 239.

My name is Kate Rossman; I am the Policy and Communications Associate of the Ohio Children's Alliance. Founded in 1973, the Ohio Children's Alliance provides leadership for Ohio's at-risk children, families, and community agencies. Our membership is made up of over 80 community agencies across Ohio providing foster care and behavioral health services to over 100,000 children and families each year.

We have already shared our support for this legislation with this committee and continue to believe that it is an important tool in combatting the children services workforce crisis.

As you know, there are simply not enough professionals available to perform treatment foster care case management. This has been a challenge for years but has only been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, our child protection system is maintaining a very high caseload of children in its custody who are placed in foster care. A high caseload coupled with a workforce shortage causes a serious challenge that must be addressed.

The bill would make state policy more flexible regarding who can serve as support staff in private foster care agencies for what are called "treatment foster homes". Treatment homes are foster homes that have extra training/support to address behavioral or medical treatment issues for foster children.

Specifically, this bill scales back the existing requirement that professionals performing this role maintain a social work license. In place of that standard, the bill expands the workforce requirement to also include individuals who possess bachelor's degrees in human services fields related to children and families and meets certain training requirements, which mirrors the standard used in Ohio's community mental health sector.

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There have been several updates to the legislation since it was first introduced. These include:

1. Removing the home assessor aspect of the bill, as this language passed as a part of House Bill 4.
2. Removing a requirement that ODJFS convene a workgroup to establish a training program for unlicensed professional treatment staff, but still maintaining that they work with stakeholders
3. Condensing the number of required training topics for unlicensed private agency professional treatment staff to those that are relevant to them
4. Allowing agencies and other qualified entities to temporarily host trainings meeting the requirements of the legislation until ODJFS determines and implements a permanent training program
5. Requiring ODJFS' approval of temporary agency trainings

While we believe many of these changes are positive, we remain concerned about the requirement that ODJFS approve temporary training programs for private agency professional treatment staff. As ODJFS does not currently approve other agency trainings, this sets an unusual precedent. We believe it also works against the legislation's overall goals of making it easier to become a treatment team member and providing relief from extraneous bureaucratic requirements for private agencies.

In summary, SB 239 is a positive step in ensuring that children will have the treatment support they need from qualified case managers. Our child welfare system needs to continue to adapt to meet the demand ahead of us. We commend Senator Blessing for responding to the needs of children and foster families across the state. We fully support SB 239.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today regarding Senate Bill 239. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

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