



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

Senate Judiciary Committee

Paul Pfeifer

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 4

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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to submit proponent for House Bill 4 on behalf of the Ohio Judicial Conference. I am Paul Pfeifer, Executive Director of the Judicial Conference.

H.B. 4 will improve the process for abuse, neglect and dependency cases in juvenile courts in several ways. First, the bill will require Children Services to notify law enforcement of all abuse reports when an arrest has not already been made. The bill will also require Children Services to report the neglect cases that the agency determines are most in need of law enforcement intervention.

Second, the bill would codify a requirement that Children Services memorandum of understanding be renewed and reviewed on a biennial basis.

Third, the bill will expand the list of assessors qualified to perform foster care and adoption home studies. Currently R.C. 3107.014 limits the list of assessors to individuals employed, appointed by or under contract with a court, Public Children Services Agency (PCSA), private child placing agency or private noncustodial agency, and individuals who meet certain professional or educational qualifications, such as being a licensed psychologist or a former PCSA employee who conducted the duties of an assessor. H.B. 4 will extend that list to include a current or former PCSA caseworker, a current PCSA caseworker supervisor and an individual with a master's degree in social work or a related field who has been employed for at least two years in a human-services-related occupation. We hope this expansion will help alleviate the assessor shortage reported by some juvenile and probate courts.

Finally, H.B. 4 contains the "Affidavit for Access" proposal developed by the OJC and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio. R.C. 2151.25 allows a juvenile court to have discretion to consider an affidavit from Children Services when a child's parents, guardian or custodian are obstructing access to the child, and there are allegations of abuse, neglect or dependency that do not yet arise to the level of filing an official complaint. The court will determine whether Children Services should have timely access to the child when warranted by a show of probable cause. This will not only allow Children Services to quickly determine whether a child is facing actual harm, but will also allow Children Services to move on and screen out the case and protect parental rights if the allegations are unfounded. This proposal was enacted in H.B. 110.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 4. We also thank the sponsors, Representative Manchester and Representative Plummer, for working with us on improvements to the bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.