



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent testimony Am Sub HB4
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, and Ranking Member Thomas, I am pleased to submit this written proponent testimony on behalf of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county public children services agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

PCSAO appreciates Rep. Plummer's and Rep. Manchester's leadership and commitment to ensure local agencies can collaborate to protect children and strengthen families.

PCSAO worked extensively with both sponsors while HB4 was under consideration in the House. Specifically, we requested three changes to help ensure that PCSAs and local partners can effectively operationalize the provisions of the bill:

- 1) Require Board of County Commissioners approval and ODJFS audit of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) biennially, rather than annually.
- 2) Narrow the types of neglect reports that are forwarded to law enforcement by requiring only certain categories of neglect reports be forwarded, rather than all neglect reports.
- 3) Consider maintaining the current requirement that PCSAs provide follow-up information to reporters who request it, rather than require this follow-up automatically to all who provide contact information.

Am Sub HB4 addresses our two biggest concerns by moving from an annual to a biennial MOU review process and by requiring only certain categories of neglect reports be forwarded. We

very much appreciate the sponsors' willingness to address these two out of three issues. (In addition, Am Sub HB4 includes language establishing a process which allows a juvenile court, if it determines probable cause exists, to issue an order, without a hearing, authorizing a PCSA to interview or examine a child who may be abused, neglected, or dependent if the child's parent refuses the PCSA reasonable access to the child (new Section 2151.25 and amended Section 2151.23). This language was developed in partnership among the Ohio Judicial Conference, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, and PCSAO to address a recognized, longstanding issue facing Ohio's children services system. It should be noted that this language also was included in the recently passed state budget bill, HB110, so is no longer needed in Am Sub HB4.)

The House added language addressing two additional issues before passing the bill—both of which PCSAO supports:

- 1) Language establishing an ombudsman office, which grew out of a recommendation from the Gov's Children's Services Transformation Advisory Council. We believe it is important that such an office be neutral and therefore able to respond to issues and concerns independently, that staff in the office have expertise in mediation and extensive knowledge of the children services system, and that there is an emphasis on youth.
- 2) Language expanding the universe of professionals who can complete the training to become foster home and adoptive home assessors. (Section 3107.014)

For these reasons, PCSAO supports Am Sub HB4. Please contact me with any questions or concerns. Thank you.