

Senate Judiciary Committee
Opponent Testimony SB216



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To members of the Senate Judiciary Committee;

My name is Chanda Beal and I have been an employee of Lucas County Children Services for the past 19 years. My current position with our agency is an Assistant Manager in the Department of Family Services and an Ohio START administrator.

Lucas County Children Service is committed to its mission to "lead the community in the protection of children at risk of abuse and neglect. This is accomplished by working with families, service providers and community members to assess risk and coordinate community-based services resulting in safe, stable, and permanent families for children."

As an Ohio Start Administrator and a seasoned child protection professional, I am *opposed* to Senate Bill 216, *Enact Dylan's Law* due to the following;

SB216:

- Requires all substance-exposed infants (except for those whose mothers are in medication-assisted treatment) to enter children services custody for at least six months
- Prohibits parent/infant contact and parent/infant residing together until certain conditions are met
- Sets the conditions under which infants may return home, which are strict and rigid when working with families.

These requirements within SB216 contradict current research and practice in the areas of substance use treatment, prenatal care, and children services; these requirements work against evidence-informed programs like Ohio START and are counter to the Family First Act.

We cannot deny the opiate and addiction crisis we are facing within our communities. Given this crisis, we already face the daunting task of ensuring safe and appropriate care of many substance-exposed infants. Thankfully there are statewide initiatives and local communities increasing programming to help support families experiencing active



substance use. In Lucas County we have found success for families in programs such as Ohio START.

The Ohio START program offers a Family Centered Approach to this epidemic. It allows for tailored and individualized case plans instead of the blanket approach seen in SB 216. Ohio START also provides the increased oversight sought through SB 216 as frequent, intensive, and unannounced face-to-face visits are a foundation of START. And Essential to the tenets of child development, Ohio START allows for the increased family time needed during this critical stage of development which is barred in SB 216.

SB216 as written, prohibits any contact between the child's parent and the child which would remain in effect until the court determines that the parent has completed an inpatient treatment program and a course on parenting a substance-exposed newborn. The bill also requires the agency to complete a home study prior to allowing contact. This extended period of no contact between parent and child is not only damaging to the parents and their relationship with their newborn but will have huge ramifications on the health, safety, and wellbeing of infants, as they grow and develop. The parent/child contact prohibited by this bill would create lack of bonding and attachment issues within the early formative months and would create barriers and challenges for families and infants down the road.

SB216's is a one-size-fits-all mandate which would prevent children service agencies and community providers from providing services to infants and families according to their unique situations and will result in many infants being unnecessarily separated from parents. Because of these strict and unreasonable mandates, we continue to be opposed to this bill.

For the foregoing reasons as well as others not captured here, I oppose SB216 and urge the Committee to do the same. I am available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.