



Ashtabula County Children Services

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Opponent Testimony SB216

Senate Judiciary Committee

Tania Burnett, Executive Director

Ashtabula County Children Services Board

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Chair Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Committee, the testimony contained herein is written on behalf of the Ashtabula County Children Services Board (ACCSB). ACCSB is one of Ohio's Public Children Services Agencies (PCSA) with the mission of assuring that children at risk of abuse and neglect are protected and nurtured within a family and with the support of the community.

At this time, ACCSB is formally in objection to the passing of Senate Bill 216, *Enact Dylan's Law*. As the bill is written, it mandates that all infants deemed "substance-exposed" be removed from their home by the PCSA for a minimum of six months; save for those whose mothers are actively in medication-assisted treatment programs. The bill also prohibits contact between those infants and their parents, including that they do not remain in the same residence, until specific conditions are met; those conditions are also outlined in the bill. This bill, as it is written, is in direct contradiction with current best practice models and research utilized by substance use treatment providers, prenatal care providers, and PCSAs across the state. It also works against the OhioSTART (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma) program model, the MOMS (Maternal Opiate Medical Supports) program model and is also contrary to the federal Family First Prevention Services Act.

In 2019, ACCSB implemented the OhioSTART program for families of children affected by substance use. Since that time, ACCSB has safely maintained 70 children in the custody of their parents through safety planning and intensive case management to prevent their removal. Statewide, the OhioSTART program has been implemented in 50 counties with a total of 2,876 participants including 1,627 children. The OhioSTART model utilizes in-home and out-of-home safety plans, intensive PCSA case management, wrap around services, strong collaboration between the PCSA and substance use treatment providers, random drug screening, and family



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peer mentors to provide a safety net for the family and prevent the unnecessary removal of the children from their homes.

For an infant and their parents, missing six consecutive months of bonding time would be detrimental to the long-term parent-child relationship. After six months of foster care, and potentially no contact with their biological parent, an infant would no longer recognize their birth parents as their parents. In these situations, the infant would be totally bonded to their foster caregiver, thus making reunification an unintended trauma for the infant and for the foster parents which could create life-long effects.

ACCSB appreciates the dedication of Ohio's legislators to the safety and wellbeing of the state's children and families. However, for the reasons we have stated here, our belief is that this bill is not in the best interest of Ohio's children and families as it is currently written. Therefore, we cannot offer our support to SB216 and urge the Committee to do the same. I am available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.