

**In the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**Senate Bill 216, Opponent Testimony**  
**Emily Dunlap, Esq.**  
**February 7, 2022**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony regarding Senate Bill 216.

My name is Emily Dunlap. I am a Senior Staff Attorney with a nonprofit legal services organization called Advocating Opportunity, though I come to you today providing opponent testimony in a personal capacity. Many of my efforts, professionally and in a volunteer capacity, have been working with populations made most vulnerable and outright harmed by our laws and policies. I see those same patterns repeating in SB216, which is why I am voicing my opposition.

Much of my professional work has been directly with people who use or have used substances, especially mothers who experienced victimization and exploitation at the hands of abusers. I have worked with these mothers in the unforgiving child welfare systems across our state; mothers who have been deemed unworthy of even basic visitation with their children because at one point in their past they used substances. Usually, I am working with mothers who have years of sobriety in recovery to show for themselves, only to have the courts throw their history in their faces to deny them time with their children. This practice hurts Ohio children and families.

Protecting children from danger is an extremely important and worthwhile effort. However, a positive drug test is not child abuse or neglect, and these children do not deserve to be funneled into the already overburdened and underfunded child welfare system. Unfortunately, I have seen, time and time again, how child protective services involvement only puts the youth they are serving in even more dangerous or abusive situations. I work in anti-human trafficking services and there has been extensive reporting about how youth in foster care are much more vulnerable to victimization.<sup>1</sup> Ohio law prioritizes reunification of families, for good reason.<sup>2</sup> Our state recognizes that children do best when they are cared for by immediate relatives, and this bill flatly undermines that goal

I ask you to please reconsider the extremely harmful penalties SB216 would place on Ohio families. This law goes well beyond its stated goals of protecting children and would instead rip apart our families. Placing more children in foster care is not a solution. Making parental reunification even more difficult for families is not a solution. Rather, ensuring there are robust

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<sup>1</sup> <https://freedomnetworkusa.org/2021/05/20/the-foster-care-system-and-human-trafficking/>

<sup>2</sup> O.R.C. §§ 2151.419; 2151.412(G)

resources available or families, strong community-based support for parents and children, is how we can make a positive difference in the lives of Ohioans. Please do not move this bill forward.

Thank you very much for your time and attention,

/s/Emily Dunlap\_\_\_\_\_

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