

The Ohio Senate

Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Senator Frank Hoagland, Chair

HOUSE BILL 92
PROPONENT TESTIMONY
June 1, 2021

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Ohio Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony in support of House Bill 92, which requires a public children services agency to determine if a parent, guardian, or custodian of a child subject to a child abuse or neglect investigation is in the military and, if so, gives them the authority and direction to report child abuse or neglect to the appropriate military authorities.

My name is Jonathan Thackeray, and I am a child abuse pediatrician who specializes in the care of children who have been neglected and abused, and I also have the privilege of serving as Professor, and Vice Chair for the Department of Pediatrics for Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine and as the Chief Medical Population Health Officer for Dayton Children's Hospital.

Dayton Children's Hospital is a freestanding children's hospital located in Montgomery County and serves as the region's only medical facility dedicated to improving the health of children. Our hospital team cares for more than 320,000 children from throughout 20 counties in West/Central Ohio.

The Dayton Children's Hospital team has a unique perspective on this issue given our long and successful partnership with the United States Air Force. We are located near Wright Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) and our clinical staff partners with our Air Force colleagues in many ways including providing training for medical students, nurses, first responders, and other clinicians. In addition, together with Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine, Dayton Children's serves as the clinical home to the WPAFB Pediatric Residency Program which has been the prototype for military-civilian collaboration in graduate medical education. This collaboration allows military pediatric residents to train at Dayton Children's Hospital (DCH) alongside civilian resident trainees and then take that knowledge to care for children throughout the world. In the area of child abuse, Dayton Children's manages two child advocacy centers (CACs) that work with professionals at Wright Patterson Air Force Base: Michael's House in Greene County and CARE House in Montgomery County. Together these centers saw approximately 1500 children and their families over the last year for some concern of abuse. Both centers have a long history of working with families that are active-duty military, and children who are military dependents, and have established best practices with our military colleagues.

Our region is fortunate to currently have accredited child advocacy centers available as a single place for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary response to occur in a comfortable, private and child-friendly environment. When police or child protective services believe a child is being abused, the child is brought to the CAC by a caregiver or other “safe” adult. At the CAC, the child tells their story to a trained interviewer who knows the right questions to ask in a way that avoids retraumatizing the child. Then, a team that includes medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health, prosecution, child protective services, and victim advocates make decisions together about how to help the child based on the interview. Often our team offers medical evaluations, behavioral health services, preparation for courtroom testimony, victim advocacy, and other services.

In our region, we are fortunate that our Air Force colleagues from either from the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) or the military police participate on this multidisciplinary team when appropriate and have partnered with us in response to cases involving military dependents.

The children services agencies in both Greene and Montgomery counties, which are closest to the Air Force Base, routinely refer cases to and work closely with those military investigative units. Additionally, the Office of Family Advocacy at the base also gets involved with these families in a supportive role. Dayton Children’s and the CACs invite military investigators to come observe forensic interviews and attend case reviews. Members of the WPAFB Office of Special Investigations (OSI) and the military police have also been active and frequent participants in professional training offered by the CACs. Not only do Greene and Montgomery County children services agencies refer to the WPAFB team, but the military team brings cases to the attention of the CACs. We have a great collaboration and a shared focus on working together to do what is best for kids.

This is how it should operate for children who are military dependents. In talking with others, we understand that not all cases are brought to the attention of the military and so I am writing to urge you to support House Bill 92 so every child who is a military dependent is protected and has access to the right kind of care and support.

Thank you, Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, for this opportunity to share my view on this important legislation.

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