PROPONENT TESTIMONY REGARDING HOUSE BILL 366

 Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee

Reverend Eli Williams

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Good morning Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee. I am Eli Williams, the president of Urban Light Ministries, a non-profit, faith-based organization that serves children, fathers and families in Dayton and West Central Ohio. I’ve been working with low income families since 1987. I am a member of the board of Ohio Practitioners’ Network for Fathers and Families, and the founder of Fatherhood Ohio. I am also the author of the book *Father Love – The Powerful Resource Every Child Needs*. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 366, which will offer much needed revisions to Ohio’s child support guidelines.

I write because my heart breaks for the hundreds of noncustodial parents – mostly fathers who reach out to Urban Light and organizations like ours seeking help. Often times through tears, they tell of their struggle to meet their child support obligation, provide in other important ways for their child, and take care of their own needs. These are not deadbeat dads. They are nearly dead broke, but are dead set on doing the best they can for the children they love. The Self-Sufficiency Reserve will address this inequity. Another of the proposed revisions is the updating of the economic tables. This severely overdue measure would ensure that establishment and modification of child support obligations are timely and reflect Ohio’s modern economy. This measures will increase the likelihood that child support obligations will be met. That’s in the best interest of children.

Adding to these struggling noncustodial parents’ heartache, is the helplessness caused by access to their child being at the whim of the residential parent. With full custody of a child born to unmarried parents assigned to the mother, the father is automatically handed a disadvantage. This enormous power granted one parent over the other is too often exploited in order to punish the noncustodial parent. Tragically, in those cases, the child suffers as the two most important people in his or her life, instead of working together, wage war over parenting time. Whereas, legal assistance would be of great help to noncustodial parents in this circumstance, low-cost legal services are generally not available to low income individuals in the State of Ohio. This injustice serves to infuriate the noncustodial parent, and thereby increases the odds of his withdrawal from his parenting responsibilities out of frustration with the system. Please keep this in mind as you consider the benefit to children of treating parents equally – as much as is possible under this legislation.

HB 366’s much needed revisions to Ohio’s child support guidelines will modify child support obligations for families throughout Ohio, affecting more than one million children. We support the establishment of the Parenting Time Credit. This legislation will provide an inclusive time adjustment for custodial parents, as well addressing key factors for non-custodial parents with a standard parenting time order, and those non-custodial parents with extended parenting time. These revisions are designed with the best interests of the child in mind. The client becomes the child, rather than the custodial parent. Therefore, benefits follow the child whether they are with their mother, father (or both), or a kinship caregiver. Furthermore, legal systems can then focus on supporting both parents to cooperate on behalf of the shared child rather than cause a struggle with each other over access to the child and financial resources. Schools may then engage and provide records to both parents in a child’s life, engaging both parents and their families in the child’s education.

For parents with more than one family to support, this legislation proposes to provide a standard income deduction for each parent for children not subject to current order so that all children may be treated equally. Modernizing health insurance and cash medical will better reflect today’s reality. Likewise, the proposed childcare credit change is in the best interest of the children of Ohio.

Chairman Ginter, and members of the Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for considering this testimony as you deliberate HB 366. And thank you for your service in the Ohio House.