

Wednesday, April 11, 2018
Ohio Senate
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Testimony on Amended HB 137

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Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni, and members of the committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to offer testimony on Amended House Bill 137.

My name is Doris Edelmann and I am here on behalf of two organizations, the Ohio Youth Advisory Board and Action Ohio. The OHIO Youth Advisory Board represents foster care youth, ages 14 and older and exists to ensure that youth voice is included in policies and practices that impact foster care youth, including group homes and residential facilities. ACTION Ohio is an alumni group of adults who experienced foster care personally, and who are dedicated to improving outcomes for the next generation of Ohio's foster youth. Our two groups have been working together since 2006 to make a difference, side-by-side.

Every state in our nation has statutes identifying professionals that have frequent contact with children and youth and requires them to be mandated reporters - but Ohio is the only state that doesn't include police officers on that list. Police officers are in a unique position to intervene and help in the life of a child or youth. For example, if a police officer is called to intervene in a domestic situation, they might see something that leads them to suspect that abuse is taking place - if they take the time to report their suspicions to Children's Services who are trained in forensic interviewing, this might ultimately end up saving that child or youth's life.

Speaking as a former child welfare worker myself, who experienced firsthand accounts from youth who did not have intervention by authorities, I strongly support this bill. I have met youth who have been arrested for domestic violence when in fact their story includes protecting themselves from adults in their homes.

The PCSAO Factbook states that the #1 reason that children and youth enter foster care in the state of Ohio is physical abuse. But the number of reported cases would be dramatically higher if all children and youth who suffered abuse was reported by all professionals. This bill will right that wrong and protect all children who are unable to protect themselves.

Sadly, throughout the state of Ohio, in every legislative district, there are children and youth who - at this very moment - are being physically abused. We care about and deeply appreciate all Ohio police officers - and want them to develop a stronger safety net for vulnerable youth in Ohio.

We recognize that some officers are already taking the time to report abuse. This bill is the next step in getting everyone on the same page, to provide consistency and protection for every child or youth in Ohio.

I sincerely ask you to pass this bill. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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