
Senate Judiciary Committee

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HB 366

Good morning Committee Chair Senator Bacon, Vice-Chair Senator Dolan, Ranking Member Senator Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Marcie Cousino and I am the Deputy Director of the Lucas County JFS – Division of Child Support. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on House Bill 366.

Lucas County administers approximately 61,000 cases; we assist approximately 189,000 individual participants and last FFY we collected and distributed over \$75 million dollars to Lucas County families. I have worked in the Child Support Program for 23 years and have been personally involved with it for more than 40 years. I know firsthand the positive and negative impact the program can have on a family. Struggling to provide for your children without consistent and reliable support payments is frustrating and can cause undue emotional stress on an already emotionally strained relationship. Often, it appears that in the child support program there are no winners, only losers. However, I am here to tell you that is simply not the truth.

Over the past several years, child support professionals have worked hard to modernize the program and to improve the relationships of the parents/children involved, by recognizing and assisting with barrier removal, incorporating parenting time orders and actively participating in fatherhood programing. As part of the systematic changes the program is making, we also recognize that there is still more that must be done in order for us to modernize the program—namely, updating the methodology and economic tables that are used to calculate a support order.

HB 366 makes several important and necessary changes to our child support guidelines, which include the following:

Economic data & table updates – the cost to raise a child, as with the overall cost of living, has significantly increased over the past 25 years, however, Ohio's child support guidelines have not. Therefore a parent who was subject to a child support order in 1992 is paying the same amount for a child as a parent in the same financial situation with a support order established in 2017. Obviously, based solely on the cost of inflation, this does not make sense since a family today is spending far more to raise a child than the same family was spending in 1992. HB 366 makes necessary updates to the child support guidelines taking into consideration the current cost of living, federal poverty guidelines and the modern family structure.

In addition, it will move the guideline tables into to the Administrative code, making them subject to a 5 year rule and JCARR review. While the underlying calculation methodology will remain in the statute, moving the tables to the OAC will allow for more timely updates based on economic and societal changes.

Parenting time - HB366 includes a 10% parenting time adjustment for obligors who have a standard parenting time order. The reduction will help to alleviate the financial stress caused when a parent is struggling to pay their support and spend time with their child. We often hear from parents that they are unable to exercise their visitation due to the fact that they have little to no money left after paying their child support. They feel bad that they have no money left to spend on entertainment with their child during visitation, so all too often they opt to not visit. Statistics have shown us that it is critical for a child to have the emotional support of both parents, therefore, by incorporating a parenting time adjustment, we are removing a barrier that might prevent a parent from spending valuable time with their child. I have personally experienced this with my own father and my son's father and believe that it is a valuable component to ensuring reliable and consistent support payments and ensuring that children have the necessary emotional support to thrive. Nothing hurts a child's self-esteem more than an uninvolved parent. We have the power to remove this barrier and by doing so, we can help improve outcomes for children.

Provides a standard income deduction for parents with multiple families – the way the guidelines currently work, they give preferential treatment to the first born or the first child(ren) with a support order. Having calculated support orders, I have seen time and time again the disproportionate way in which our current guidelines calculate support for multiple children from the same families. HB366 will help to balance this, first by requiring that the same children from the same family be treated equally and consistently in the guidelines, but also, by giving both parents the same amount of credit for any additional children for which they may be providing financial support.

Changes in the health care requirements – under the current guidelines, a CSEA or court is required to order one or both parents to provide private medical coverage when available at a reasonable cost. When private coverage is not being provided by the parent ordered to do so, the child support obligor is required to pay cash medical. Cash medical is an amount that is set based on the amount of the obligor's income and is required to be paid during times when private health insurance is not provided. The implementation of this on again/off again component of cash medical is confusing and frustrating for families, attorneys, courts and CSEA professionals. It can generate huge arrearages or overpayments and does not provide families with consistent reliable support payments. HB366 seeks to remove the confusion and frustration while ensuring that families and the State continue to receive both the support and cash medical payments to which they are entitled.

These are just some of the numerous ways that HB 366 will positively impact families and help local agencies to modernize and advance the child support program.

Your support and passage of this bill is greatly appreciated.