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JUVENILE / PROBATE DIVISION**



May 20, 2022

Chairmen Hillyer, Vice Chairwoman Grendell, Members of the House Civil Justice Committee:

I am the Portage County Juvenile and Probate Judge. I am writing in support of HB 648. This is a collaborative effort between Portage County Domestic Relations Judge Paula Giulitto and Portage County Juvenile/Probate Judge Patricia J. Smith. This bill is intended to expand the jurisdiction of the Domestic Relations Court. The Juvenile Court would be transferring paternity, custody, and child support of never married individuals who had children, to the Domestic Relations Court.

The basis for this transfer is to ensure the uniformity of the treatment of these cases. The procedures will be more consistent with one jurisdiction. This is an effort to benefit all the citizens of Portage County and have all family matters being litigated in one court. This will allow for enhanced management of case flow and case efficiency. This will also eliminate conflicts which arise when the Domestic Relations Court issues civil protection orders to individuals who have custody matters pending in Juvenile Court, or with families who have children born before and after a marriage.

The reconfiguration of the Domestic Relations Court would permit the Juvenile Court to commit its efforts and resources to cases involving children where there are allegations of abuse, neglect, and dependency and juvenile criminal and traffic matters. The recent dramatic increase in the caseload of these categories of cases has caused the Juvenile Court to investigate alternative programs and other rehabilitation options to better serve the youth and families. The Juvenile Court is focusing on quality hearings, offering much needed services to families, and protecting child safety. The Juvenile Court is implementing specialty dockets such as a juvenile drug court, case management services, implementation of a newly formed CASA program, and increased mediation for truancy and other non-formal delinquency and unruly matters. The Juvenile Court is focused on increasing services to the youth of Portage County and assisting families to be successful.

Respectfully,


Judge Patricia J. Smith

Probate Court: 203 W. Main Street, Ravenna, Ohio 44266
Juvenile Court: 8000 Infirmity Road, Ravenna, Ohio 44266

(330) 297-3870
(330) 297-0881