



Senate Judiciary Committee
Opponent Testimony S.B. 216

February 8, 2022

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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, and Ranking Member Thomas, and respected members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony concerning Senate Bill 216.

The Jackson County Department of Job and Family Services (JCDJFS), which is inclusive of the community's Public Children Services Agency, focuses on a vision of empowering, protecting, and serving our community with respect and integrity. As an Agency, we place significant importance on stabilizing families and promoting the well-being and safety of the children that we serve.

I am reaching out to share my opposition to Senate Bill 216, Enact Dylan's Law. As it is currently written, the bill requires every substance-exposed infant (except for infants whose mothers are participating in medication assisted treatment – MAT) to enter children services custody for a minimum of six months and prohibits infant/parent contact and infant/parent from cohabitating until specific circumstances are met. Additionally, the bill establishes parameters that present additional complexities to the reunification process while working in drastic contrast to evidence-informed programs like OhioSTART (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma). This framework is contrary to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA); as

well as well-informed practice and research in the areas of children services and substance use disorder treatment.

While there is no debate as to the persistent protective measures needed to ensure the safety and well-being of infants, it is essential that professionals work together with families to understand the intersection of child welfare and substance use disorders. Strength-based, evidence-informed and trauma informed programs and practices can align a myriad of supports and services that impactfully intervene and shift outcomes for both families and children. While it may be necessary to relocate a child into kinship or foster care, completely removing children from their parent's focus and goals will thwart the formation of the critical child-parent bonds that occurs throughout the early months of life. If parents are to be accountable and successful at maintaining sobriety, they need to be engaged, motivated and driven while working toward that objective.

Over the course of the last several years, the JCDJFS has been provided with the opportunity to successfully support families struggling with addiction through the OhioSTART program. Through this children services led initiative, which includes the support of a peer mentor, children and families have experienced improved outcomes. Programs, such as this one, provide alternatives to supporting families struggling with addiction without placing every substance-exposed infant(s) into long-term foster care. It is for that reason that I urge you to please oppose S.B. 216. Let's create opportunity, promote recovery, and move forward with a plan to change children's lives together.

Please know that I am available for questions that you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Adult and Child Protective Services
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