

October 18, 2023

Justin Pizzulli  
House District 90  
77 South High Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus Ohio 43215

Dear State Representative Pizzulli,

Greetings! By way of introduction, I am the previous director of Adams County Children Services. After 31 years, 2 months, and 9 days of dedication in the protection of Adams County's children, I made the decision to retire. Although I no longer work within the field of child welfare, I remain passionate about the well-being of our children and the families who live in Adams County.

I am writing to you to express my belief in the necessity of an additional Common Pleas/Juvenile/Probate Judge to serve the families and children of Adams County. I believe this position is not only necessary but an urgent need to expedite court services for our families. Across the State of Ohio, Child Welfare is an important topic that does not often get the attention needed, other than when something terrible happens to a child. It is necessary for our local and state leaders to address the issues facing Adams County Children Services, as a whole. As the number of foster homes and suitable placements continue to decrease, the number of children in need continues to rise exponentially.

The number of children in the custody of Adams County Children Services has reached a critical level, and swift intervention is necessary. With the increase in child welfare cases alone, there is not enough time in a day for one judge to expeditiously process and facilitate the cases. From a leadership standpoint, I know the impact of loss of time and productivity of the children services caseworkers. Staff, along with other service providers and parents, are often left waiting in the courthouse hallways, for hours on end at times, due to the number of hearings on the docket. When you consider the overall impact of these delays on all involved, it can be quite disheartening. Most importantly, these delayed hearings significantly impact parents who have lost time at their employment and desperately need the hours for income to take care of their children. Further, with the case load sizes per caseworker, compounded with the time and delays spent waiting for cases to be heard, caseworkers are missing critical field time for prevention and/or ongoing services to families and children to achieve more productive outcomes for families. The Ohio Administrative Code outlines the time frame for involvement in the lives of families and children. With the current volume, the time frame is often going far beyond the 24-month period permitted.

One of the main funding sources for the children services budget is Title IV-E federal dollars that can be utilized for services provided for children in need of substitute care. To obtain this essential funding, there are requirements for timely court reviews and specific language contained within court orders regarding reasonable efforts/best interests. The children services agency can't continue to meet the needs of our county's most vulnerable residents, our children, without the proper funding sources in place. More than \$300,000 monthly is being spent on costs for substitute care (foster care, group homes and residential centers) by Adams County Children Services, with no assistance from other local

agencies. Federal, state, and local tax levy dollars are funding the agency at present time. The Adams County Commissioners have been very involved and supportive to assist with the financial burden we are facing. If an agency does not have the proper funding to operate, then what? What happens to the children who need the protection and permanency mandated by the local children services agency? It is imperative that we utilize and retain every avenue of funding available. The addition of another judge will help alleviate some of these issues.

Adams County Children Services current budget is in serious jeopardy due to the large number of children being placed in the agency's custody. While many children within the agency's custody are placed due to cases involving abuse, neglect and dependency, there are several youths in placement who could be better served through involvement with other community partners. Removal of a child from their home and placing them into foster care or a group home setting, due to truancy, does not seem to be the most valuable and cost-effective method of prevention that could be provided to a child and their family.

I hope this letter accurately conveys the crisis occurring in Adams County currently. We need relief, we need support, and we need to ensure the continued protection of our county's children. Please consider this request for an additional Common Pleas/Probate/Juvenile Judge in Adams County.

Sincerely,

Jill M. Wright