



Dayton Police Department - Lt. Colonel Eric Henderson
House Bill 583 - Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives – Families and Aging Committee
June 25, 2024

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and the Families and Aging Committee members, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony concerning House Bill 583.

In 2022, the City of Dayton began to experience a notable increase in the amount of calls for service involving group homes in our community. These calls were for missing or unruly juveniles to more serious issues involving harm to these children. The City of Dayton is uniquely qualified to speak on this matter, as current data shows that Montgomery County has at least 60 of these homes. There are 42 in Dayton, the highest number of group homes in the State. The next highest county is Hamilton, which has 36. However, Franklin County only has 14 of these homes.

Last year, Dayton Police Officers located a missing child from one of the group homes. The child appeared hesitant to return to the home and upon being questioned, disclosed that he had been touched inappropriately by another juvenile in the home. The child was a ward of another county and the appropriate Children's Services agency was contacted but advised they would not respond to care for this child or work to place him in another home. The safety plan offered was to have the juvenile sleep with the adult caregiver. The officers involved did not feel comfortable with this plan, so arrangements were made for him to sleep at the police station until a forensic interview could be conducted the next day.

Last month, our officers were dispatched to a group home about a 14-year-old male unconscious with head injuries. The child was removed to Dayton Children's Hospital where he was in life-threatening condition requiring him to be placed on a ventilator. Due to the severity of his injuries, a call out for homicide detectives was made. The initial investigation revealed that the victim had taken a gaming console from the home, and when he returned without the console, the other group home residents severely beat him in a coordinated attack with no adult or group home employee being aware. Three juveniles, some from outside of Montgomery County, were confined to the Juvenile Justice Center on charges of felonious assault.

The instances I have described are alarming examples of a growing issue impacting the safety of children placed in group homes. The safety of children is a concern that transcends jurisdictions and agencies and is truly a collective responsibility. Our officers routinely encounter children from group homes that have been placed hours away from family, friends, and the agencies that are charged with their well-being. We, along with our partners in the Courts and Children's Services, have been presented with numerous instances where the adverse effects of these long-distance placements have impacted resources, which are already stretched thin.

The proposed legislation being discussed today will significantly increase the safety of children in our community by enacting more stringent requirements for operating a group home. This legislation takes a holistic approach by not only heightening standards for group home operators but also by providing enhanced standards and training for support agencies and first responders when dealing with at-risk children in the group home environment.

One significant aspect of House Bill 583 is that it strives to ensure that no particular region has a disproportionate number of group home facilities. This would mitigate the extremely long-distance placement of youth, easing the burden on communities by sharing the responsibility for the care of these children.

I want to thank the bill's sponsors, Representative White and Representative Plummer, for their efforts in addressing these issues. I appreciate your time today, and we hope you will support the passage of House Bill 583.