



House Health Committee

**House Bill 7
Representative Tom Brinkman, Sponsor**

**Supportive Testimony by
Greg Kapcar, Assistant Legislative Director
January 9, 2008**

Supporting Adoptions, Reducing Barriers

Chairman White, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee, I am Greg Kapcar the assistant legislative director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO represents the 88 public child protection agencies here in Ohio. Through this proactive coalition of public child welfare agencies, we promote the development of sound public policy and program excellence for safe children, stable families and supportive communities. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 7.

PCSAO thanks you and your colleagues in the General Assembly for past and current support of adoptions. For example, SB 238 (126th; Senator Tom Niehaus, Sponsor) the Child Welfare Adoption Reform Bill implemented many adoption process reforms including the requirement of a large family assessment when five or more children reside in the home; and increased information sharing provisions for all entities involved in the adoption process. Plus, in the most recent state budget you increased the state base for adoption assistance from \$250 per month to \$300 per month; an investment supporting over 6,600 adoptive families like Jane Tompkins. Jane testified before the Human Services Subcommittee of Finance sharing her family's story about adopting two special needs children, a brother and sister, from the public system. Representatives Jones, Brown and Boyd remember Jane's powerful and heartfelt testimony as she described how the increase in adoption assistance could help families and children like hers as they strive to overcome histories of abuse and symptoms that

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often go hand-in-hand with abuse and neglect like behavior problems, attachment disorders and various others. Jane summed it up best when she said, "Increasing the adoption subsidy is money wisely and compassionately invested in Ohio's children." So, on behalf of Jane, her family and other adoptive families across Ohio, thank you for your continued support of adoption.

PCSAO strongly believes that every child deserves a safe and loving home. While 70 percent of all finalized adoptions of waiting children are made by foster parents who have provided temporary care for the child and "fallen in love," there are still numerous children for whom we are seeking forever families. Finding safe, permanent and forever families for children in care and the 2,781 children waiting for adoption is very much a part of what we do at public children services agencies. HB 7 helps in this mission!

Attached you will find an outline of this bill. As you can see, it includes numerous provisions:

- **Strengthen child's right to own history**
- **Permanency for children**
- **Promote adoption as a positive option**
- **Streamline adoption process and procedures**

When you think about recent findings that three in 10 people consider adoption and 71 percent of those consider foster care adoption as their primary method for creating or expanding their family, we are very excited that **several provisions in the bill reduce barriers to prospective and existing foster caregivers and adoptive candidate families, by streamlining the bureaucracy involved.** Many families are both certified foster caregivers and approved adoptive homes. Most agencies require the same training (there are exceptions for infant adoptions), but the processes and timelines are currently different, which is frustrating and confusing to many families and the professionals that serve them. Currently ODJFS is granted authority in rule to outline both processes. This bill requires the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS) to adopt rules that align the foster care certification and adoption approval processes, making them the same while still allowing a family to choose to only be one or the other. The PCSAO Rule Review Committee, in collaboration with ODJFS, has already

begun work to have the processes aligned and we appreciate the legislative direction set forth in HB 7.

This bill also takes steps to reduce the number of children and youth being indefinitely left in the custody category of Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. Ohio has over 2,800 youth in this category, one which means family reunification efforts are not ongoing, yet the child has not been freed for adoption so efforts to match this child with a forever legal family are not being made. It is believed this category is overused as a convenient solution to hesitancy to terminating parental rights. While 95% of the children in this custody category are adolescents, it is far too many children left to age out of foster care without a forever home.

Other provisions in the bill **proactively promote adoptions as a positive option in cases of unintended pregnancies** by building on established curriculums such as: Middle School / High School Comprehensive Sex Education curriculum for all students; Learning Earning And Parenting program materials for teen parents (LEAP, a program to encourage teens to complete school, part of Ohio Works First); Graduation, Reality And Dual-role Skills curriculum for pregnant and teen parents (GRADS, education curriculum in Ohio public schools); and training done by the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program for caseworkers and supervisors.

Adopting a child is an act of the heart, and it is a life long commitment. PCSAO thanks this body for your past and continued support of adoption and Ohio's children in need of safe, permanent and forever families. We really appreciate the leadership by Representative Tom Brinkman in coordinating input and suggestions from stakeholders, from both public and private sectors, and laying the important groundwork for dialogue on supporting and reducing barriers to adoption and making the most effective changes to meet the needs of Ohio's children.

Chairman White and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 7. At this time, I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.