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CHILD PROTECTION UNIT
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**SUPPORTIVE TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL 197,
EXPANSION OF GRANDPARENT POWER OF ATTORNEY
AND CAREGIVER AUTHORIZATION AFFIDAVIT
REPRESENTATIVE MARIAN HARRIS, SPONSOR
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
JANUARY 27, 2010**

Good morning Chairman Harwood, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Dawn Yeakley and I am one of two Kinship Care Coordinators at Clinton County Job and Family Services/Child Protection Unit located in Wilmington, a rural county in Southwest Ohio. We assist Kinship families, who are, as you know, relatives and friends raising children which aren't their own when the parents are unable or unwilling to do so. The majority of Kinship Caregivers that we work with are grandparents. Many took on the parenting role with their grandchildren without any legal documentation. With the passage and implementation of the Grandparent Power of Attorney and Caregiver Authorization Affidavit, these and many more grandparents have been able to secure the medical, financial and educational needs necessary for the well-being of their grandchildren, without the obstacles and stress formerly involved. The grandparents have been allowed to provide stability on a long-term basis and sometimes have been awarded custody at the hearing required after the one-year Power of Attorney or Caregiver Affidavit. I'd like to thank the state of Ohio on behalf of the grandparents for seeing this need for grandparents and passing that legislation.

This brings us to the situation of relatives other than grandparents providing homes for these children. Their arrangement is often more difficult because some providers are willing to bypass legal documentation for grandparents if the grandparent is known to providers. This rarely happens with other relatives. For example; Kim, the biological mother of Amber still held custody while Amber lived with her uncle Doug. The arrangement was informal throughout Amber's elementary school years, but the school district allowed her to attend. When Amber reached middle school, she was not allowed to enroll because Doug did not have custody. Doug could not afford the lawyer fees to file for custody, so he tried to have Kim enroll her. Kim did not live in the same school district as Doug, so the school would not allow her to enroll Amber. Currently, Doug is hoping to find a pro-bono lawyer or borrow the money to file for custody.

Another example of the need to expand the Power of Attorney is the following: Bonnie has lived most of her life with her great aunt, Linda. Bonnie is now three years old, but Linda's

mother holds custody and also works full-time. Linda and her husband helped Linda's mother pay the fees for custody of Bonnie and her sister, Becky several years ago. Becky still resides with Linda's mother and is in school. Linda lives in a different county than her mother and wanted to enroll Bonnie in Head Start. Because Linda did not have legal documentation, Bonnie couldn't be enrolled in the county where she lives. Linda's mother had to enroll Bonnie in Head Start in the county she lives in and Linda transports Bonnie to Head Start there. Linda's mother receives Bonnie's Medical Card, but gives it to Linda to use for Bonnie.

Possibly the most problematic obstacle faced by relatives (other than grandparents) caring for children is the lack of authority to consent to the child's medical care. Phil, who is raising his two nephews has to search to locate the parent every time one of the children requires medical treatment. Many caregivers are forced to rely on hospital emergency rooms to provide all the child's medical care. With few or no available alternatives, the caregiver waits until an urgent situation arises and then requests a full medical examination.

Without easy access to medical care and school enrollment, the caregiving relationship is less than optimal, both for the relative caregiver who is struggling to provide for the child's needs and for the child who is seeking stability and predictability. Additionally, children may be bounced from parent to kinship caregiver and back again, depending on the parent's whim.

According to the 2000 Census, Ohio ranks eighth in the number of children, 157,298, under eighteen living in grandparent-headed households and seventh in the number of grandparents, 86,009, responsible for basic needs of their grandchildren living with them. Documentation of children living with relatives and others besides grandparents are not so readily available. Most population projections suggest continued increases in the number of children placed with relatives if social and economic factors continue to increase.

Kinship caregivers take on a selflessness and devoted role in a child's life. In doing so they face challenges and many obstacles on a daily basis. If we have a way or an opportunity to help these families succeed, I feel we should use it. Passing HB 197 would not only help caregivers, but also the children in their care.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my support of HB 197. I am happy to respond to any questions.


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