

## **Testimony HB 197**

Good morning Chairman Harwood, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Dionne Michelle Simmons, I am the Program Director of the Kinship Navigator Program in Montgomery County. I am a state employee with Wright State University, Center for Healthy Communities.

I would like to provide you with some information related to my work with kinship families relevant to HB 197, which proposes expansions to the current legislation, HB130.

The Kinship Navigator Program in Montgomery County provides ongoing support to relatives, primarily grandparents, that are raising children in the home.

- The Kinship Navigators work with approximately 500 families a year. Ninety percent of these families do not have custody of the children in their home.
- The Power of Attorney and Caretaker Authorization Affidavit have been successful in providing grandparents the ability to enroll the children in school and seek medical care in the absence of the parents.
- The POA and CAA are widely used and seen as effective tools in Montgomery County to allow grandparents to provide care and support for the children entrusted to their care.
- In an effort to understand and develop rules for implementation of HB 130 here in Montgomery County an Ad Hoc task force was formed through the Kinship Caregiver Coalition. The HB 130 Task Force worked with Magistrate Ralph Wilcoxson and the Juvenile Court Clerk of Court Supervisor to develop materials and processes to facilitate timely and appropriate filing of the documentation required for grandparents to obtain Power of Attorney and Caretaker Authorization Affidavits.
- The HB 130 Task Force is made up of representatives from 7 school districts, Juvenile Court, Legal Aide of Western Ohio, Kinship Navigators, public health nurses, and caregivers. The Task Force continues to meet two times a year to discuss ways to improve the process and to report success stories.
- In 2009, the Kinship Navigators assisted 176 grandparents with the Power of Attorney (POA), and 65 grandparents with the Caretaker Authorization Affidavit, and 271 Pro Se applications.
- Here in Montgomery County for relatives that are seeking custody of relative children most of the court hearings are scheduled 60 -90 days after filing the Pro Se application. This often creates a delay in services for children in the care of relatives.

### **Comments from Grandparents that have used the POA/CAA:**

#### **Letter from Marcia Venus**

Dear Ms. Simmons:

What a pleasure it has been to deal with two members of your staff, Bonnie Grooms and Karen Doty. I commend you for providing such excellent service.

My husband, Richard, and I have recently received the Power of Attorney for our 14-year-old granddaughter, Misa Iguchi. Misa was born in Japan and lived there until 2 weeks ago when she joined us. Her mother is our daughter and so Misa is an American citizen. We have been working our way through the various legal and educational systems to get her enrolled in the Centerville schools, which she started on Monday. We also need to provide her with insurance, and were led to Bonnie Grooms, who couldn't have been more helpful. She explained things to us, sent us forms, and called us regularly for several days to be sure we knew how to fill out the forms and what to do next.

Then she referred us to Karen Doty, whom we will meet next week for the final steps, assuring that we have completed documents accurately and can move the process forward. Karen also couldn't have been more helpful on the phone. She made me feel like everything could be handled and she would take care of us.

So often we hear that government systems are staffed with people who really don't care and don't go the extra mile for their clients. Well, that was far from our experience. What we are going through is a bit overwhelming. Our children range from 37 to 44 and taking over a teenager is daunting. With the help of Bonnie and Karen, I think we'll make it through this step in the process.

Please thank them both for me. Congratulations on managing a great team.

Cordially,

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