

**HB 197, Kinship Caregivers**  
**January 27, 2010**

Good morning Chairman Harwood, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Patrick Donovan, and I am the Kinship Navigator at Muskingum County Children Services.

I fully support HB 197, which expands the grandparent power of attorney forms and grandparent caregiver affidavit authorization forms out to other kin caregivers.

During my tenure, I have had the opportunity to provide input in helping establish HB 130, and have then actually seen the bill put into action. This in and of itself, was a very exciting experience. In Muskingum County, which is a medium-sized county, I have identified over 300 kin families. Approximately half of those families have had involvement with Children Services, and half have not. The vast majority of these families that continue to keep these children safe, while keeping the children out of the child welfare system, operate with no formal custody.

Just recently (January 2010), I have begun analyzing children that are with kin and then become involved with Children Services. Not surprisingly, 100% of these children are families that had prior involvement. The flip side of this, are those families that have no formal custody, or power of attorney. These are the families that are the least likely to become involved with Children Services. These are the families that will benefit from HB 197.

One of the biggest problems that these families face, are getting the children enrolled in school. If the child has a broken bone, the ER will treat them. However, if the legal custodian (absent or not) resides in another school district, the school district (where the child resides with kin) is more apt to try and put financial responsibility on another school district, and prohibits the child from enrolling. This is not uncommon. In fact, just this week, I dealt with this issue more than once. I will quote a school administrator (January 25, at 1:40pm), that "unfortunately it is all about money". When I talked with her about testifying here today, she responded, "that would be great" (if the bill passed to include other relatives) and inferred that she didn't understand why they limited the POA/CCA to just grandparents. I know that in Muskingum County, children's best interests will be served if HB 197 includes other relatives as well as grandparents.

One of the smartest children that I ever worked with was in this situation. The school refused to let him enroll because his legal guardian resided in another county and State. This child sat out the majority of his Junior year in high school. This young man took it upon himself to walk to school on his own, and try to convince the principal to let him attend. He was unsuccessful. This child had a 3.5 GPA. His Aunt did not have the authority to enroll him. By the time his Aunt was able to obtain formal custody through traditional court means, it was April 20<sup>th</sup>. This child had sat out of school this whole time wanting nothing more than to go to school. After enrollment, he attended school, and did extra work on-line, graduated early, and then went on to the Armed Forces.

I have had conversations with Judges who proclaim that this sort of bill could be used to get children on football teams, etc. The population that I work with do not have the financial means

("pay to play") to allow the children in their care to play sports. Of the 177 children on my caseload, I cannot think of one child that plays sports. Again, I will proclaim that at least in Muskingum County, children's best interests will be served if HB 197 is adopted.

Thank you, I am happy to respond to any questions.