House Criminal Justice
Ohio House of Representatives

Supportive Testimony
S.B. 58, Senator Jeff Jacobson
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Chair Latta, Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Angela Sausser Short and I am the Research and Policy Coordinator for the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO represents the 88 public child protection agencies in Ohio, working for safe children, stable families and supportive communities. I am pleased to appear before you today to state the Public Children Services Association of Ohio's support of S.B. 58.

S.B. 58, also known as the Endangering Children bill, increases penalties for certain drug offenses when the offense is committed in the vicinity of a school or a juvenile. PCSAO believes this is important legislation to enact as Ohio has experienced an increase of drug offenses being committed near a school or a juvenile, particularly offenses involving the production of methamphetamine. According to the Criminal Intelligence Unit, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, Office of Attorney Jim Petro there were 79 reported meth sites in FY 1999 and 114 meth sites in FY 2002. In FY 2003, when the report was released, there had been 179 sites discovered thus far. In fact, while some areas of Ohio are reporting high numbers and others are reporting none, it is believed that these differences are due to a level of awareness and training, rather than a true absence of meth in those areas. Of course, as the number of sites increase, the number of child abuse and neglect referrals to public children services agencies have also increased.

It is important to emphasize that producing and/or distributing drugs around children does have a devastating effect on children. According to Rosemary DeMenno, of the National Crime Prevention Council who authored an article for the PCSAO's Heartbeat stated that meth is the newest safety threat to our children. *"Children living or visiting meth labs are at risk for neglect and are more likely to be physically and sexually abused. Parents or caregivers who are meth dependent become careless, irritable, and violent, and often become unable to nurture their children. These children often do not receive proper medical or dental care, proper hygiene, or sufficient sleep. Children growing and developing amidst the chaos, neglect, and violence of a meth lab often experience stress and trauma that affect their behavioral and emotional health. These children often exhibit low self-esteem, poor social skills and lead to consequences such as delinquency, attachment disorder, and teen pregnancy… Exposure to low levels of meth ingredients may produce headaches, nausea, fatigue, lung irritation and dizziness. Exposure to high levels may cause shortness of breath, chest pains, lack of coordination, eye and tissue irritation, chemical burns, and in some cases, even death. Chronic exposure to the chemicals can lead to cancer, brain damage, liver damage, birth defects, and more".*

Finally, children living in meth labs may experience hazardous lifestyles. *"Filth, explosives, guns and other weapons, and booby traps are often found at meth lab sites. Substandard housing structures, plumbing problems, poor ventilation, lack of heating or cooling, running water or refrigeration also are often lacking. Rodents and insects may infest the site. Other risks include exposure to pornography or overt sexual activity and contact with dangerous animals trained to protect the labs".*

Many of Ohio's public children services agencies have established protocols for entering meth labs and removing children from such devastating conditions. The protocols require that the child protection agency contact their local fire department, police department, and drug enforcement agency and request their presence when investigating a possible meth lab. Child protection workers who are entering a meth lab must wear a protective outfit so to prevent any contact with harmful substances. When children are removed from a meth lab, the children must have their clothing removed and sprayed down so to prevent further spreading of toxic

chemicals. If a worker does not wear the protective outfit, s/he would also have to be sprayed down to prevent further spreading of chemicals.

As horrific as this is and embarrassing for children and their workers, meth labs are a very serious threat to anyone who comes into contact with such chemicals used in manufacturing meth. Children are definitely endangered when they are in the vicinity of such a lab, therefore while supporting S.B. 58, PCSAO had hoped for the sub bill to include expanding drug offenses but also the offense of endangering children in Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code. We feel that when drugs are being manufactured in the vicinity of a child, this should definitely be child endangerment and thus, the offender should be charged accordingly. In Section 2919.22 of the ORC, when a person is under the influence of alcohol or other substances and driving with a child in his/her car, the person is charged with driving under the influence as well as child endangerment. PCSAO feels that manufacturing and putting children at risk of being exposed to drugs is similar to the drinking and driving scenario. With this being said, PCSAO does support S.B. 58 and feels it is a step in the right direction to protecting children from the harmful effects of meth labs as well as other drugs that may be produced and/or distributed near their schools and in their own homes.

Children should be able to live in a home that does not have chemicals, lithium batteries and cold tablets strewn about the home. Children should be able to be safe in their own home, school and community. S.B. 58 is a necessary bill to support and enhance the drug offenses being committed in the vicinity of a school or juvenile. PCSAO has worked with the sponsor Senator Jeff Jacobson to draft this bill and would like to thank him for his hard work in protecting the safety of Ohio's children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to respond to any questions at this time.