



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Ohio Senate
Senate Health Committee
Testimony on Am. Sub. HB 110
May 4, 2021
Angela Sausser, Executive Director
Public Children Services Association of Ohio
37 W Broad Street, Suite 1100, Columbus OH 43215
Angela@pcsao.org
614-224-5802

Good afternoon Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony on Am. Sub. HB 110. My name is Angela Sausser, and I am the Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's 88 county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities. I am joined here today by a panel to highlight the current state of children services, why resources are needed to achieve transformation in our system, and what transformation means to children and families.

Two years ago, we stood before you and shared that Ohio's children services system was in a significant crisis largely due to the addiction epidemic, and that new resources were needed to help our system stabilize. At that time, our PCSAs had experienced an increase of children in foster care; more children with very complex, multi-system needs; more reliance on kinship caregivers; and an increase in placement costs. The Governor and the General Assembly became champions of our system by making a historic investment in the last budget for children services.

We appreciate the Governor and the House maintaining these critical investments as there continues to be an increased volume of children in foster care (39% more than 10 years ago).

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Annual foster care placement costs have increased by \$88M in 4 years (and \$34M in 2 years). Overall, children services spending (local, state, and federal dollars) has increased 14% in the last 10 years or \$146M more. This increase in overall children services spending is on pace with cost-of-living adjustments (20%) for the past 10 years. I share these numbers to show that our county public children services agencies are efficiently managing costs and effectively stabilizing the system in the face of an addiction and pandemic crisis.

When we look ahead to the next two years, we see new state and federal requirements for children services that will significantly increase local costs with no new local resources in HB 110. We support state and federal efforts to transform how families and children are supported in the children services system. **Ohio must get this right, which means we must align new policy requirements with new local resources** to ensure that kids can remain safely with their families, that children are placed in the most appropriate setting, and that the most effective services are being provided to reduce trauma in children's lives.

The first significant gap in HB 110 revolves around kinship. The state created a new Kinship Support Program at the end of 2020, during the lame duck session. While the executive budget includes new dollars to cover the costs of the state portion of the program, it does not include new dollars to cover the increased cost to counties. **If only half of the kinship caregivers become licensed foster parents, the estimated cost to counties will be an additional \$37M/year.** The state has estimated the local cost to be closer to \$25M/year. Either way, there are no new resources in the state budget to cover the county costs for this new Kinship Support Program.

The second significant gap pertains to a new federal child welfare law called the Family First Act that Ohio must implement by Oct. 1, 2021. This Act requires states to provide new evidence-based services to families to prevent children from coming into foster care. Family First provides federal funds to pay for up to half (50%) the cost of these evidence-based prevention services. **State resources are needed for the ongoing match of the prevention services.**

In addition, Family First requires children's residential and group home settings to meet new, costly, clinical quality standards (called a Quality Residential Treatment Program). If settings fail to meet these standards, Family First prohibits federal reimbursement of placement costs. ODJFS forecasts that between a fourth to a half of Ohio's residential centers will not meet this standard by the federal deadline of Oct. 1, 2021. **Our estimates show that counties will lose between \$18-25 million per year in federal reimbursement** due to facilities not being able to meet these new requirements by the federal deadline.

Finally, HB 110 moves in the right direction with policy changes that will begin transforming Ohio's children services system. However, the proposed new children services funding in HB 110 is focused solely on state costs related to new policy changes and leaves counties without additional resources required to appropriately carry out these changes.

The new state and federal requirements will cost county Public Children Services Agencies at a minimum \$52 million per year. This estimate is based solely on the cost of the new Kinship Support Program and Family First implementation, and not on the additional transformation policy changes. The below chart details the significant gaps in children services funding in HB 110.

Therefore, PCSAO, along with the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, respectfully requests that the Senate Health Committee address this funding gap and **provide an additional \$50 million per year to the State Child Protection Allocation found within ODJFS ALI 600523.** This funding is critical so that Ohio's county PCSAs can successfully implement the newly established Kinship Support Program, the Family First Act, and the proposed transformational efforts within HB 110.

Without this new investment, what is intended to be state and federal transformation mandates will instead have a **crippling impact on county PCSAs, erode their stabilization**

efforts and prevent counties from beginning to transform the children services system.

Without this new investment, PCSAs will not be able to appropriately provide services to families, keep children safely at home, support kinship caregivers, and address the ongoing workforce struggles. Even in a state-supervised, county-administered system, it is appropriate for the state to cover a portion of the county costs for new state and federal programs and requirements.

Gaps in Children Services Funding for Transformation Efforts

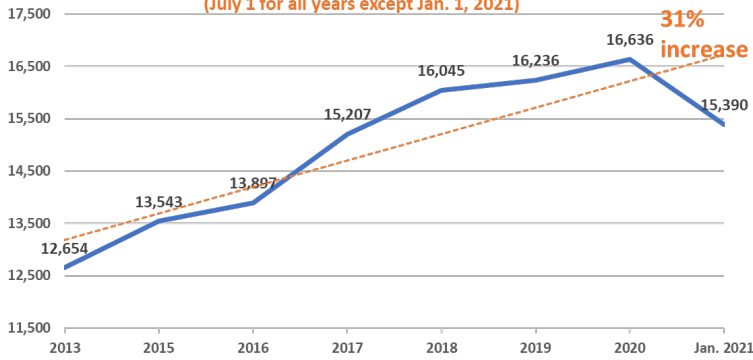
2022-2023 Executive Budget

	SFY21	SFY22	SFY23	Change (SFY21/23)
GRF Allocations to Counties (HB 110 will maintain at state level)	\$148.2M	\$138.2M	\$138.2M	- \$10M/year
TANF Earmark: Kinship Caregiver Program	\$15M	\$10M	\$10M	- \$5M/year
Estimated Unfunded New Costs to Counties				
Kinship Support Program		\$37M	\$37M	- \$52-57M/year minimum
Family First Implementation		\$18-25M	\$15-20M	
Other Transformation Policy Changes		Unknown	Unknown	
State-Level Children Services Programs and Operations	\$31.7M	\$95.2M	\$90.7M	+ \$59M
State-Level Initiatives	\$4.7M	\$18.8M	\$20.5M	+ \$15.8M

Attached to my testimony is additional information about the current state of Ohio’s children services system, the funding gaps in HB 110, Family First Act, current and proposed kinship changes, and the State Child Protection Allocation. I am happy to answer any questions after our panel concludes. Thank you.

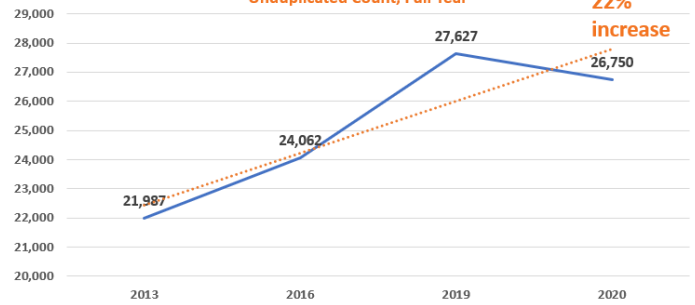
Children in Foster Care—Point in Time Count

(July 1 for all years except Jan. 1, 2021)

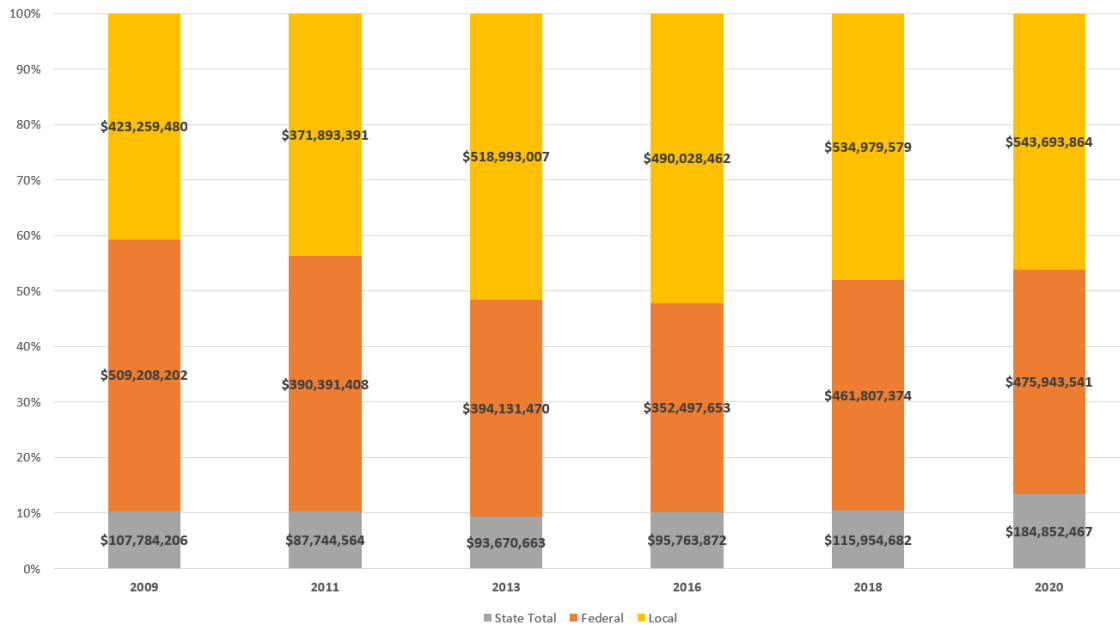


Children in Foster Care—Over the Entire Year

Unduplicated Count, Full Year

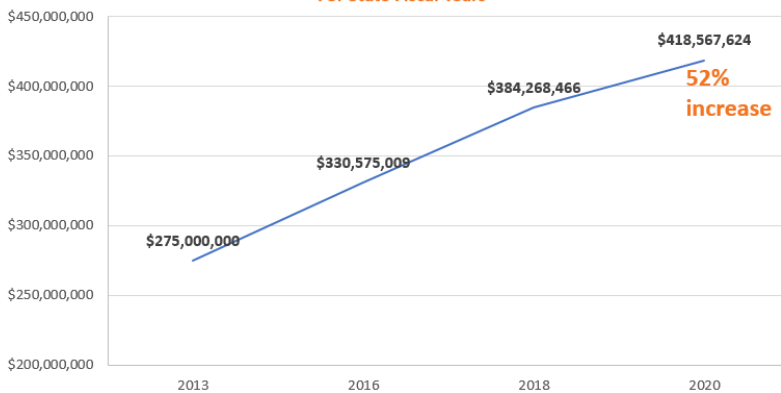


CHILDREN SERVICES EXPENDITURES BY FUNDING SOURCE, 2009 - 2020

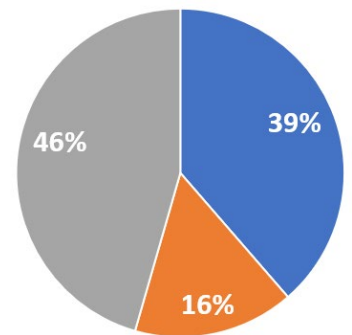


Foster Care Placement Costs

For State Fiscal Years



SFY20 Children Services Spending Total = \$1.2B



■ Federal ■ State ■ Local

Senate Health Committee
May 4, 2021
Testimony, Am Sub HB110
Jody Walker, Executive Director
Jody.Walker@jfs.ohio.gov

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the budget bill, specifically as it relates to children services. My name is Jody Walker and I am the executive director of South Central Ohio Job and Family Services (SCOJFS), which serves Hocking, Ross, and Vinton Counties. We are a quadruple combined agency, responsible for public assistance, child support, workforce development and child welfare.

Like my colleagues on this panel and my fellow directors across the state, I am appreciative of the increase in state funding for county children services agencies in the current biennial budget.

Those resources have allowed South Central to continue to meet the needs of the children and families we have served over the past two years, and without those resources, we would have had significant funding issues without the state's investment.

I have spent the past twenty-four years working in child and family services, with almost twenty-two years as a county director responsible for children services, specifically in a rural Appalachian county setting. I wish I could come before you today and say that the crisis is over, but I can't. As an agency, as a county, and as a system, we are overwhelmed with the needs of the children and families we serve daily. This is attributed to a variety of reasons, many of which all counties are facing: the opiate/drug crisis; severe mental health issues; continued high custody counts; increase in placement costs; lack of foster homes; lack of regional residential facilities; and lack of resources, both financially and service based.

The custody count in my three counties has stayed consistent for the past two years, yet our cost of care has increased. We felt the impact of the opiate crisis in Southern Ohio much sooner compared to the rest of the state, which has now turned into a drug/severe mental health crisis, along with the significant needs our children are experiencing. From January 2013 through April of 2021, the agency has spent \$38,003,191 in placement costs. During that time, our costs increased 129%, from \$2.3 million in calendar year 2013 to \$5.4 million in calendar year 2020.

Between January 1, 2021, and April 30, 2021, our agency had 198 children in custody, with a daily placement cost around \$16,098 per day. Of the 198 children, we had 32 children who required a residential/secure placement setting. These 32 children, 16% of our total population, cost \$7,391 per day, or 46% of our total daily placement costs. This is our challenge---these trends aren't going to change anytime soon.

Working in an area where we do not have abundance of resources or service providers, we have to look at how we develop the assistance we need for our children and families. As I highlighted earlier, local residential treatment facilities are non-existent in Southern Ohio. A majority of our children placed in congregate care are being placed across the state, which creates challenges for reunification and continuum of care locally. To help address this issue, our agency, along with several other JFS/Child Welfare agencies, have partnered over the past few years to engage a local mental health provider to fill the void in this area. By this fall, our area will have a new residential facility which aligns with Ohio RISE and the Family First Act. Expansion of these services, along with creation and maintenance of prevention services, still require additional resources. Locally, we are trying to be innovative and responsive in ensuring we are meeting the needs of our children and families, but those come at a cost. As you can see from just our increased placement costs, a majority of our new resources, along with our local levy funds, are going to support our kids in care. Any additional resources we can use to build on the state's previous investments would be much appreciated as we move into the next biennium.



Jody Walker, Executive Director
P.O. Box 469, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601

At the end of the day, I am the director of a three-county agency, but the kids in my community aren't just Hocking, Ross and Vinton counties' kids --- they are Ohio's kids, and they deserve your support.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate all support this committee can provide in helping the children and families of Ohio.

**389 West Front Street
Logan, Ohio 43138
740.385.5663**

**475 Western Ave
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740.773.2651**

**30975 Industrial Park Drive
McArthur, Ohio 45651
740.672.2250**

855.726.5237 (855.SCO.JAFS)



COSHOCTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB & FAMILY SERVICES
Public Assistance • Children Services • Workforce Development • Child Support
Danny Brenneman, Director

Good Afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and other distinguished Committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on Child Welfare from the perspective of one rural, East-Central Ohio County. My Name is Danny Brenneman and I'm the executive director of Coshocton County Job & Family Services. Our agency provides services in the areas of workforce development, child support enforcement, public assistance, child welfare and represent our family and children first council.

Financially in our child welfare area, we are broke, to use blunt terms. Just last month I met with my commissioners to review our inability to continue to pay for kids in care at the current rate and cost and that, as an agency, we've done everything imaginable and then some with our internal finances to keep current with foster providers and facilities. Our commissioners understand the problem and scenario and that this is a county/state crisis; not just an agency one. They've graciously offered assistance to the level they are able to. That said, our own county's general fund could not even sustain the costs we realize currently. Since 2014, Coshocton's costs for kids in care has risen 400% to approximately \$2,300,000 for 2020, or nearly \$200,000 per month. And these are costs we have little, if any, control or influence over.

The costs we are realizing mount and continue because of increased census (now 66 kids in agency custody monthly average compared with 18 in 2013) as well as increased daily costs and more difficult cases with multiple barriers and fewer placement options. We're still reeling from substance abuse in our community. In a recent sample, nearly 80% of new cases had substance abuse as a deciding or influencing factor. Children are being born to drug-addicted mothers and dysfunctional families and the effects are long-lasting if not permanent. The daily cost for ne current placement for a child with complex needs is \$435, while another is \$317. Annually, that is a total of \$274,000 for two children in our custody. After partial federal reimbursement for one of these youth, Coshocton County's share of these placement costs approaches \$202,000 per year.

As a point of reference, these will consume about 35% of the total proceeds from our levy. This is what I meant when I said that we have little, if any, control over placement costs. These two youth need residential care because of their trauma and to help them on their path to healing.

The citizens of Coshocton County understand and are generous and supportive. We have a levy that has been renewed several times since 1998 – this renewal generally passes by significant margins. In 2018, with drastically rising foster costs, we attempted a new .4 mill levy. This levy failed by 3%. The clear message to me was that our citizens are able and willing to continue support but are simply not able to add additional burden. In addition, we've recently lost significant tax revenue as a large facility (American Electric Power – Conesville) closed. This reduced our levy revenue and only compounds our dire situation.

While staff turnover and trauma are high, pay is low and hours are long, our caseworkers along with dedicated service providers in our county work with diligence to provide the best services possible. I'd put the work, care, and effort of my staff against any in the industry or otherwise. But we need help.

I've worked for Coshocton County since 1995 with positions in workforce development, finance, mid-level management and now as executive director. I've never seen a more critical or pivotal point in any of the service areas in our agency or community. Investment in child welfare is *assurance* and *insurance* that we can provide quality services to children and families to keep them safe and healthy. This, in turn, minimizes time and resources needed "down the road" and undoubtedly saves lives.

Members of this committee, I simply ask for your full consideration and support for additional investment to the child welfare system at the local level. Federal and state changes and mandates are upon us, and your investment will assure our ability to prevent incidence of child abuse and neglect as well as meet the needs of unfortunate but ongoing costs. My testimony only represents one small county but speaks for many similar in our state.



I want to give an example of success when we work together. The pictures you've been presented are of James. He turned one-year old last Fall. James was born to an addicted mother who could not take care of him. Because of the work of many dedicated professionals in the child welfare system, James was adopted into a permanent, loving family on March 11. I just saw James last week, and he is doing awesome! What could be a higher priority for us all?

I truly thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.



Ohio Senate
Senate Health Committee
Sarah L. Hayden, Peer Support Specialist
Thrive Behavioral Health/Warren County Children Services/ Ohio Start Program

May 4, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Sarah Lynn Hayden. I am a Peer Supporter at Warren County Children Services and work with families who participate in the Ohio START Program. I have worked in child welfare for three years but my involvement with children services didn't start with my job.

My story starts when I was placed into foster care at 6 weeks old due to my mother's struggle with mental health and drug addiction. This was the beginning of my journey as a statistic within the foster care system. A child already labeled due to the decisions of others. I remained in foster care until I was adopted at the age of 4.

As many children in the child welfare system, my hardships did not end when I was adopted. I was sexually abused by a family member from the age of four until I was eight. I tried to tell but no one heard or believed me. My voice was taken from me and I was feeling unloved and abandoned.

These feelings intensified in my teen years after finding out I was adopted, my biological mother did not want me (in part because I am biracial), and not knowing who my father is, in addition to the trauma I had experienced. I was lost, scared, and confused.

I started using alcohol and cocaine at the age of 14. I gravitated towards the bad crowd to feel a sense of belonging and get back at those who hurt me or didn't believe me. I started to get a rap sheet and I was in jail facing 10 years by age 22. While in jail, I found out I was pregnant. I was scared calling my parents to share what would be happy news for most, but it is not happy news when you're on your way to prison. My parents assured me they loved me and would support me through my pregnancy and jail time.

I was released on probation and ordered into treatment. I quickly regressed by opening my house to men who sold drugs, used me, and I relapsed. As a result, I was sentenced to prison while my parents cared for my 6-month-old baby girl.

In prison, I was Inmate WO 75645. Stripped of my identity not unlike what happens to foster children in our system. I was incarcerated for 32 months. I never wanted to be a mom that choose drugs or men over my child and this time in prison was my ah-ha moment. I began to explore my pain, my fears, and tried to see my self-worth.

My clean date is October 22, 2010. I was no longer willing to let my history define my identity. I found strength I did not know I had to make changes. There have been many obstacles,

but I made a promise to myself and my children I would be better each day and am proud of each accomplishment I've made.

I found a job in childcare as a Family Advisor. I saw myself in the kids and families and began working to offer resources and compassion. I wanted them to know I understood and did so with no judgment. I saw the benefit of helping those in need. People without support network built into their lives and how having this can lead others to succeed. How showing care to a frustrated mother can deter abuse. How providing resources to a family can avoid neglect.

My journey is not without additional challenges. I have had toxic relationships, have suffered from depression and anxiety, have been involved in an open case with children services, and have struggled with my sobriety. I now feel I have a purpose driven life to help children and families who want a new start.

My path led me to Peer Support. By 2018, I was a Certified State of Ohio Peer Support Specialist hired through Warren County Children Services to be a part of the Ohio START Program. I work alongside caseworkers to support families. Every day, I use my labels (addict, inmate, foster child, mother, victim, survivor), my scars, and my strength to help families see recovery is possible. I walk hand in hand with the families, their hurt, their obstacles, and their successes. My favorite quote is, "A Closed Mouth Doesn't Get Fed." When I wasn't advocating for myself, nothing I needed or wanted was being heard. So today, I am speaking for others who don't have a voice.

My role at children services is vital and the work we do is not easy. The real-life situations can be daunting. The overdoses, the abuse kids face, and the lack of basic needs are real. Intervening early with children helps prevent the cycle of abuse, promotes child safety, and builds long-lasting resilience. We do this job because we care and want to see change.

As you make decisions about funding for children services in the state budget, I ask you to remember my journey. Consider the impact children services agencies can make on someone like me as a child and as an adult.