



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Ohio Senate Health Committee
Testimony on HB 96
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Good morning, Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this children services panel testimony on HB 96. 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

In testimony for the SFY24-25 budget, we shared that county public children services agencies faced a crisis where children had to spend at least one night – and sometimes much longer – at their county public children services agency (PCSA) due to the lack of placement and treatment options for youth with complex, multi-system needs. In fact, a study that ODJFS conducted in October 2022 showed that approximately 500 youth in 2021 had to spend at least one night at their county PCSA – a government agency – for this reason. We know this creates additional trauma for our children, which is unacceptable. A child has been removed from home and then must face the reality that no foster home and no residential treatment facility will accept them for placement, leaving no choice but to sleep at a government agency.

Due to this ongoing treatment/placement crisis, county PCSAs have had to purchase cots for their offices, make arrangements for showers at nearby shelters, figure out how best to provide meals, and assign staff to provide 24/7 supervision. Some PCSAs have had to pay for law enforcement to stay at the agency to ensure everyone's safety, in addition to the overtime for their workforce.

We are grateful that Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Director Wentz convened a cross-system working group in August 2023 to research this ongoing placement crisis and identify achievable short-term and long-term solutions to prevent children from having to stay at a PCSA when no other placement is available. We are pleased to share that several short-term strategies have been put in place during SFY25 by DCY, such as incentives for providers to reopen beds and working to discharge youth who have been in a residential facility for more than two years.

We are even more pleased that HB 96 includes dedicated one-time funding (\$20M in SFY26/\$10M in SFY27 in DCY Line Item 830506) to establish regional short-term (45 days) crisis stabilization centers called **Child Wellness Campuses**. This solution was prioritized by the Children Services Placement Crisis Working Group and by our own members, the county PCSAs.

We ask that the Senate **maintain this proposed investment** so that children will not have to sleep at a county agency but instead can be in a safe setting that can de-escalate and stabilize their behavior while providing much-needed behavioral health screenings, diagnostic assessments, and treatment planning. This would provide the county PCSA with the information and time to find an appropriate placement that can meet the youth's level of need.

The target population for the proposed Child Wellness Campuses is children in custody of a PCSA, as well as those at risk of custody relinquishment as determined by the PCSA. For a number of years now, the General Assembly has supported policies to prevent custody relinquishment from occurring; this innovation would continue to support that goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I, along with the other panelists, am available to answer your questions.