



Ohio House of Representatives
House Finance Committee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
Testimony on HB33

March 7, 2023

Tammy Osborne-Smith, Director
Jackson County Department of Job and Family Services
25 E. South St., PO Box 1006, Jackson, Ohio 45640
Tammy.Osborne-Smith@jfs.ohio.gov
740.688.4133

Good morning, Chairman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and distinguished members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to share testimony with you regarding HB33. My name is Tammy Osborne-Smith, and I am the Director of the Jackson County Department of Job and Family Services (JCDJFS) in southeastern Ohio. I have worked in the field of human services at both the state and local level for twenty-eight (28) years.

Soon after becoming JFS Director in 2013, I learned that our local child protection system was on the verge of what business would refer to as bankruptcy. Of course, we all know that insolvency is not an option for child protection. The reality at that time was that costs were increasing at an exponential rate while the number of youth placed in care grew. That has not stopped. In fact, the number of kids in care has increased by about 400% since 2013. In that year, foster care placement costs in Jackson County were just under \$500,000. Last year, these expenses reached an all-time high of just over \$2.2 million. This dilemma is not unique to the Appalachian communities but is rather a harsh reality in small, medium, and metro counties alike.

25 E. South St.
PO Box 1006
Jackson, Ohio 45640
www.jacksoncountyjfs.com

Medicaid, Food & Ohio Works First Cash Assistance	1.844.640.6446
Adult and Child Protective Services	740.286.4181, Option 2
Child Support Enforcement Agency	740.286.4181, Option 3
Workforce Development (OhioMeansJobs)	740.688.4201

Jackson County Commissioners

Paul Haller

Donnie Willis

Jon Hensler

With caseloads quadrupling we have been confronted by a myriad of challenges. Children, especially teenagers, are frequently being placed in residential care because there are no longer many resource families willing to take them simply because of their age. It comes as no surprise to a caseworker when a provider immediately declines a placement once the child's age is revealed. The lack of placement solutions for youth is not only frustrating for staff, but it also impacts the well-being of youth in care. Just last year, we had a teenager at the agency until the late hours of the night, and while waiting for law enforcement to install his ankle monitor, staff sought suitable placement for hours. And, when other youth like him have been at the Agency throughout the night, they have shared comments like, "well, no one wants me." – It is heartbreaking. -- While these children wait, trying to sleep on a tiny cot in the corner of a small meeting room, caseworkers are often contacting more than sixty (60) potential placement providers just to find a safe environment for a child.

Beyond the growing volume of cases and increased costs, over the last decade, cases have become far more complex. Families and children no longer present with a single issue, but are rather affected by homelessness, poverty, addiction, mental illness, behavioral health challenges, juvenile delinquency, developmental disabilities and physical health problems that require more... more staff time, more intensive services, more crisis supports, more trauma-informed planning and care, and more funding support. This quagmire of issues has perpetuated another crisis, a workforce crisis. Frustrated, saddened, exhausted, and traumatized by the extraordinary complexities involved with these cases, many caseworkers have simply elected to resign from the field.

Counties have been struggling with staff recruitment and retention challenges for years before the "Great Resignation." Over a period of just three years, our team filled the same four positions four times each. Please keep in mind, it takes approximately two (2) years to sufficiently train and develop the strong critical-thinking skills required of a caseworker.

Research reflects that more than half of the caseworkers in Ohio's children services agencies experience some level of secondary trauma; this factor is one of the key contributors to caseworker burnout and distress. Over the last several years, the CPS workforce has been faced

with an inordinate number of challenges and persistent changes. While attempting to adjust their practice to the addiction crisis, they have been unceasingly forced to work caseloads that often consist of more than twice the recommended volume. In response to this predicament, our team sought new solutions.

Just a few years ago, we began making a shift: we looked toward opportunities for transformation. And, thanks to a new levy as well as an infusion of some much-needed funding in the last biennium budget, we began to reconstruct our team.

We began to take a deeper dive into each of the factors causing staff burnout and emotional exhaustion. This led us to focus on Safety Culture and a partnership with PCSAO. Through this journey, we have had to be transparent, vulnerable, and realistic. The work is tough, and the interventions needed to combat a half-decade-long retention and recruitment problem were not to be created overnight.

While our efforts have us headed in the right direction, there is still far more work to be done. Across the state, counties are struggling with dangerously severe workforce shortages right now. And Directors, like me, well, many of them lie awake at night, worried that they do not have the staffing needed to ensure child safety. The fact is that caseloads continue to be too large; a more modern foster care system is needed to right-size treatment options, and appropriate level of care options and crisis-stabilization centers are a necessity. For these things to occur, additional investments are needed throughout Ohio.

Members of this Committee, I ask for your full consideration and support for the additional investments in the child welfare system at the local level outlined in HB 33. Children deserve a commitment that promotes their safety and well-being.