



**Date:** Tuesday, Jan. 29, 2019

**Time:** 11:00 am

**Location:** Riffe Center, 77 S. High St., Columbus, OH 43215 (30<sup>th</sup> floor)

### **Participants (18):**

- LeeAnne Cornyn, Director of Children's Initiatives for the Office of Governor Mike DeWine
- OHIO YAB: Doris Edelmann, Lisa Dickson, Melissa Stroud, Lori Argiro, Julius Kissinger, Marianna Stevens, Kristin Camac and Ida Yarno
- ACTION Ohio: Jamole Callahan, Deanna Jones, Ruth-Ann Jones Thompson, Nikki Chinn, Juliana Barton, and Tracy Robinson
- Adoption Network Cleveland: Betsie Norris and Aaron Ockerman
- Purple Project: LaTasha Watts

### **Agenda:**

- 1.** Introductions and well-deserved congratulations to LeeAnne Cornyn
- 2.** Appreciation for Governor Mike DeWine and the many ways that he has served as a champion for Ohio foster youth in his former role as Ohio Attorney General
- 3.** Creating a statewide Ombudsman's Office
- 4.** Reforming Ohio child welfare funding
- 5.** Establishing an ongoing communications mechanism to stay in touch and keep working together

*Thank you for taking this time to meet with  
Ohio foster care youth, alumni and adoptees*

**The OHIO YAB (Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio)** is Ohio's statewide voice of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

**ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)** heads up ongoing initiatives including College for the Day, Suits for Success, Pay It Forward, Thanksgiving Together and Three Days on the Hill.

**Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection™ (ANC)** provides information, advocacy, education and support for adoptees, birthparents, foster/adoptive/kinship care providers, foster youth and their siblings, and professionals. Their initiatives include Reconnections, which provides peer group and/or one-on-one support for young adults who have aged out of foster care and are exploring relationships with birth family members.

**The Columbus State Scholar Network** provides Current or former foster youth who are admitted and enrolled at Columbus State with ongoing mentorship, peer support, and leadership experience. **This program exists because of Governor Mike DeWine's support of the Ohio Reach initiative in his former role as Ohio Attorney General.**

**Junior League of Columbus** is an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. They have chosen to make the needs of foster youth a priority (as have the Junior Leagues in Cincinnati and Cleveland).

**The Purple Project** exists to assist foster care youth and young adults who have or will transition (age out) of the foster care system with maintaining stability. Their programs include hosting an annual conference in Cleveland.



**We have long considered Governor Mike DeWine to be a champion of the needs of foster youth.** He included our voices in each of his 2012 Child Safety Summits, and empowered foster care youth and alumni as Subject Matter Experts during the 2012 *Two Days in May* Conference.

Many of our members have benefitted from his support of the Ohio Reach initiative Ohio Reach to improve post-secondary outcomes for foster care youth and alumni.

**Just as Governor Mike DeWine has always been a champion for Ohio foster care youth,** we desire to be a support to him and his ongoing work – particularly what we consider to be the three greatest needs in Ohio when it comes to child welfare:

- 1.** Creating a statewide Foster Care Ombudsman's Office
- 2.** Reforming Ohio child welfare funding
- 3.** We are deeply grateful that a Director of Children's Initiatives Office has been established in the Governor's Office, and that LeeAnne Cornyn is serving in this role.

We would love to create an ongoing communications mechanism to stay in touch, such as inviting the Director and/or a member of her staff to attend statewide quarterly meetings of the OHIO Youth Advisory Board.

## **1.) Need for a Statewide Foster Care Ombudsman:**

- Ohio foster youth have shared concerns that their basic needs are not being met in certain foster care, group home, residential and adoptive placements.
- They have reported being placed in unsafe and/or unsanitary conditions.
- They have expressed difficulties in contacting their caseworker and/or GAL/CASA.
- They shared feedback that their local agency hotlines often have long wait times, lack of follow-through on reports made directly by youth, and staff answering the phone who are not youth-friendly.

## **Role of the Statewide Foster Care Ombudsman**

- To act as an independent forum for the investigation and resolution of complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care and make appropriate referrals.
- To independently investigate concerns expressed by foster care youth and young adults related to placement, care and services.

## **Benefits of having a Foster Care Ombudsman's Office**

- To serve as a protective measure to safeguard the physical safety and emotional well-being of youth whose lives are entrusted to the foster care system.
- To ensure that foster youth are cared for and receiving the services they need
- To provide a venue for the voices of concerned foster care youth and teens be heard, without fear of retribution.

## **Services provided by Foster Care Ombudsman's Office**

- Maintain a toll-free telephone number which foster children and teens may call from anywhere in the state with questions about their rights, their care and well-being, issues with their placement or services received while in foster care.
- Listen to complaints, documents concerns, gather all relevant information, remain neutral and impartial and provide information on how to help.

## **Risks of not establishing a Foster Care Ombudsman**

- When a child or teen continues to experience abuse without intervention, the greatest risk is death.
- When an abused child or teen runs away, that young person is at risk of human trafficking.

## **Three Examples from Other States:**

1.) **California's State Ombudsman for the Foster Care Program** was created in 1998 with the passage of *Senate Bill 933, Chapter 311*; which required the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsman to be established within the State Department of Social Services with prescribed powers and duties.

The fact that this position exists within the California Department of Social Services has created concerns that to effectively execute this role requires more authority and independence. The office is valuable, but its location creates a conflict of interest.

2.) **Oregon's Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman** was created in 2013 with the passage of *Senate Bill 123 (section 2, part 7)*: which established a hotline phone number that is available to the foster child at all times for the purposes of enabling the foster child to make complaints and assert grievances regarding the foster child's care, safety or well-being.

3.) **Texas's Office of the Ombudsman** was created in 2015 as established by *S.B. 830*. Implementation of the bill included:

- Establishing an office of consumer affairs, and employing staff as needed to fulfill the duties of its office
- Developing statewide procedures in order to receive inquiries and complaints from foster youth, and to review and investigate questions, complaints and concerns
- Establishing a secure form of communication with a child or teen who files a complaint with the office in order to ensure that young person is informed of the progress of the office's investigation.

## Additional Insights from Youth

a.) Ohio foster care youth expressed urgency that this future Ombudsman needs to be available to young people in group homes and residential placements, as well as foster homes. They shared concerns that youth in group homes or residential aren't believed, and their concerns are disregarded.

Quote from youth: *"The danger of some group homes and residential placements is that things happen behind walls, and other people don't know what's really going on."*

b.) In terms of defining 'What is abuse?'

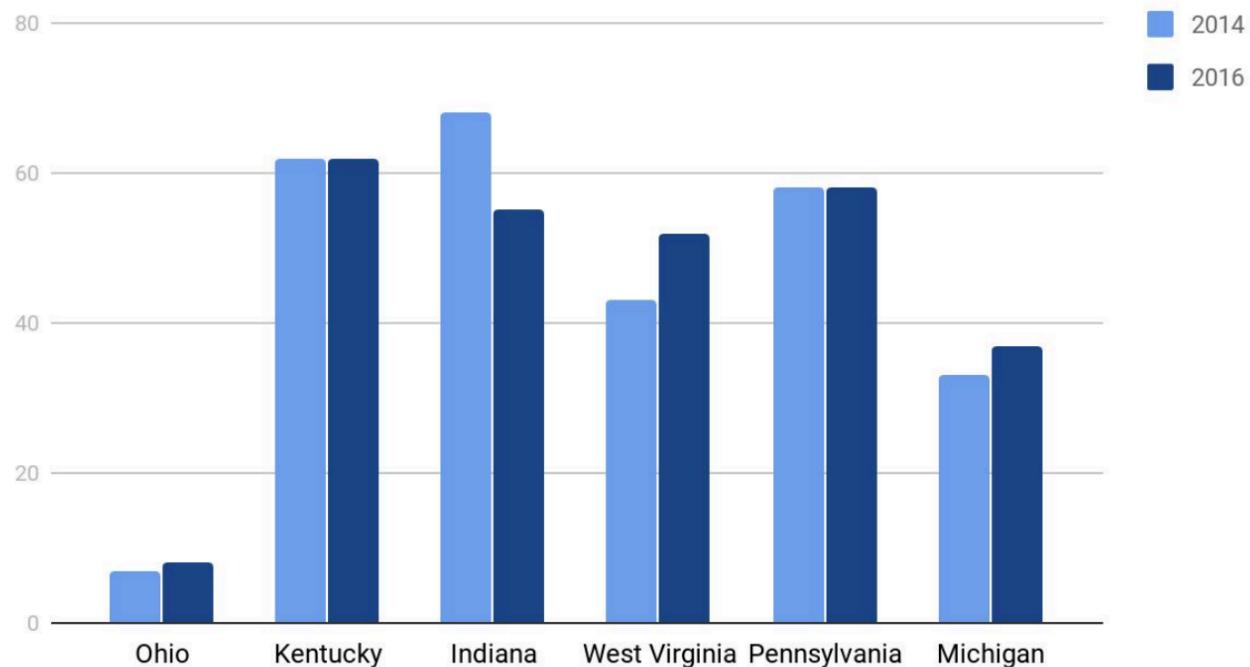
Youth felt that a good rule of thumb is that: *"If a caseworker would open a case against my biological parents for this allegation, then if it happens in a guardian, kinship, respite, foster, adoptive, group home, residential placement, it should also be thoroughly investigated."*



## **2.) Reforming Ohio Child Welfare Funding**

- Ohio is one of only nine state-supervised, county-administered child welfare systems in the country.
- The other eight states are: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Virginia.
- Three states are considered “hybrid” because they are partially administered by the State, and part by counties: Maryland, Nevada and Wisconsin.
- Ohio ranks last in the nation when it comes to the percentage of child welfare funding that is paid by state revenues. For every dollar spent on child welfare in Ohio, state government contributes only 10 cents
- Quoting from PCSAO’s website: *Other state governments contribute an average of 43 cents of every dollar spent on child welfare; in Ohio, state government contributes only 10 cents, while counties shoulder half the costs.*
- Because Ohio depends upon local funding at a greater proportion than any other state in the nation, this leads to heavy reliance on local taxes – which has led to funding inequities.
- When it comes to working towards that safety, permanence and well-being of foster care youth - as well as preparation for their future - the inequity of funding impacts the local level of services, resources and support.
- Adrian McLemore, founding member and first President of the OHIO Youth Advisory Board, often refers to this as: *“88 different ways of doing the same thing.”*
- We would like to see Ohio as a state make a greater financial investment in the safety, permanence, well being, and preparation for the future of foster care children, teens and young adults.
- We request not only that funding levels be increased, but that there be a mechanism put into place to ensure that **the immediate safety and long-term outcomes of foster care youth** are prioritized.
  - Continuum of care proposals can be cost-saving measures.
  - Keeping children out of foster care or reunifying them prematurely can leave them at risk of continued trauma, ongoing abuse and/or loss of life. Safety considerations need to be included in kinship care placements as well.

## Child Welfare Funding State Budget Percentages



## Midwest State Comparisons

	State 2014	State 2016	Local 2016
<b>Ohio</b>	7%	8%	48%
<b>Kentucky</b>	62%	62%	0%
<b>Indiana</b>	68%	55%	0%
<b>West Virginia</b>	43%	52%	0%
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	68%	55%	0%
<b>Michigan</b>	33%	37%	2%

**Source of information:** Child Trends and the Annie E. Casey Foundation