

## **2016 –Sunset Review Committee**

### **Child Support Guidelines Advisory Council Testimony**

Good afternoon Chairman Jordan and members of the Sunset Review Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Child Support Guidelines Advisory Council. My name is David Fleischman and I am the Bureau Chief of the Program Services Bureau in the Office of Child Support, Department of Job and Family Services.

Federal regulations require each state to establish a single set of child support guidelines to be used by courts and child support enforcement agencies statewide. Every four years the state must review its child support guidelines to determine whether child support orders issued in accordance with the guidelines – and using the corresponding child support worksheets – adequately provide for the needs of children. In Ohio, the Department of Job and Family Services is responsible for conducting this review.

The Child Support Guidelines Advisory Council was established by the legislature through Ohio Revised Code §3119.024 to assist the department with its review of the guidelines. The statute requires the council to include child support obligees and obligors, child support program professionals, judges and attorneys practicing in the domestic relations area, members of the House and Senate, as well as other interested advocates. Each representative brings his or her own perspective to the council and ensures that the department does not review the guidelines through any single lens but from a broad view of the experience and expectations of these stakeholders.

The council plays a key role in two required elements of the guidelines review: a study of economic data related to the cost of raising children, and the analysis of how often and why courts deviate from the guidelines.

Federal regulations require the department to review economic data on the cost of raising a child as part of each guidelines review. The department contracts with an economist to collect the data and make recommendations. The council works closely with both the economist and the department to identify national trends and to ensure that the guidelines represent economic realities in Ohio.

Federal law also presumes that all support obligation amounts derived from the basic child support schedule are correct, and that deviations from the schedule are rare. The council therefore also assists the department in conducting a survey of selected counties to identify and analyze trends in how and why courts deviate from the guidelines. If the council identifies

an upward or downward trend in the use of a particular deviation criterion, or identifies other needed changes in the deviation statute, that information is reported back to the department with recommendations.

Beginning with the recruitment of members for the council and ending with the issuance of the department's report to the General Assembly, the guidelines review lasts 6 to 12 months. During most of that time, the council meets in Columbus on a monthly basis. Council meetings typically last all day. In addition to the monthly meetings, council members typically attend at a forum that allows members of the public to address the council on matters of concern to them.

The council has no full-time staff. Members are not compensated for their time but are reimbursed for travel expenses. The department provides logistical support for the duration of the council and assumes all costs associated with guidelines review, including the reimbursement of travel expenses.

The positive role the council plays is evidenced by its recommendations over the years. The recommendations of the 1997 council were the foundation of the Child Support Reorganization Act of 2000. More recent councils have helped the department identify changes that, if adopted, can be expected to have a positive impact on Ohio's child support program. These included recommendations to request the General Assembly update the guidelines table and worksheets (not done since 1992) to reflect current economic conditions, and, to ensure more frequent updates, to remove the table and the worksheet from the Ohio Revised Code to the Ohio Administrative Code.

The department supports continuing the legislative mandate for establishing the council as part of the guidelines review as it ensures stakeholder involvement in the review and representation of their various viewpoints.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.