

**Darke County Department of Job and Family Services**  
**Director, Gracie G. Overholser**  
**Proponent Testimony on HB 298**  
**December 8, 2015**

My name is Gracie Overholser and I am the Director of Darke County Jobs and Family Services. Thank you very much for this opportunity to support House Bill 298 and to share with you some of the experiences I have had in working with many residents here in Darke County.

I moved to Darke County with my family when I was two years old. I was the youngest of five children. My mother was a registered nurse, and my father a social worker. At the age of 11 my mother passed away with cancer, and six months later my father passed away with an aneurysm. I became a foster child in Darke County. My roots run deep here. I love this area, and I have dedicated the biggest part of my life to the service of Darke County. I have had the opportunity to work these past 28 years at the local level with people living in poverty, living in foster care, being unemployed, being addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, and the life challenges which go with it in fighting the addiction.

There have been many changes here in Darke County since I started in 1989. The programs back then were food stamps and ADC. Maybe a thousand households in the county were on food stamps. ADC was much bigger. Today, our programs are known as SNAP and OWF, and our numbers have multiplied. We are a quad combined agency that includes public assistance, children services, child support and the local Ohio Means Jobs center.

In addition, Darke County JFS has guidance and responsibility over the County Home, and Michael's Resource Treatment Center. The Michael's Resource Treatment Center is a facility for boys that are in foster care. Some of these individuals have many issues ranging from addiction themselves to addiction of a household member. The County Home has several residents living there that have had their lives devastated by addiction to drugs, and have no place else to go or no one else to turn to. Many of these individuals not only lack the financial resources, they also lack the social resources and personal resources to obtain and keep employment. These are just some of the individuals that need constant attention and guidance.

I see the devastation of addiction on a daily basis. I want to help individuals fight and overcome this devastation. I want to help the children and the other family members of those suffering from addiction. Although it seems endless and costly I truly believe this is our duty. It is what Job and Family Services should be about. We should assist them in getting employment so they may care for their family and get off the assistance role. I do not want to penalize the other family members of someone who has an addiction. I would like to see them still be able to receive the OWF while we fight the battle of addiction together. We can put the individual in a treatment program while getting them employment. This will not be an easy process as addiction is a difficult thing to overcome. While I recognize that drug testing OWF recipients will not by itself completely solve the problem of addiction and poverty, I do believe it is a step in the right

direction. Building on that, we can together identify common strategies which can work from system to system as in each community we have our own mix of resources as well as our own mix of people we serve.

In Darke County alone in the last couple years, we have uncovered over \$900,000.00 of SNAP benefits being traded for drugs. Some have even used the OWF cash to purchase drugs. We have taken children into custody because father is in jail, and mother was involved in a traffic accident due to her addiction. We have also taken children into custody because of drug addicted mothers giving birth to drug addicted babies. In Darke County we have had a grandson rob his grandparents at gunpoint to obtain cash for his drug addiction. I have witnessed individuals shooting up in our city park, and not caring that little children were just feet away.

Our courts run high with cases of addiction, and putting these individuals on probation. Our common pleas court judge and I have recently completed a memorandum of understanding to work closely with the individuals on probation with addiction problems. Many of their clients are our clients. We want to assist them in finding and keeping employment, and to make them better citizens of our community while they fight their battle of addiction.

The challenge we face every day is most employers drug test individuals prior to employment, and do not want to give second chances to anyone on probation. I would like to catch the addiction prior to someone getting involved with the court. I know we can't solve all the drug problems in this state, but drug testing of welfare recipients will help us with keeping these individuals on a straighter path while assisting them with seeking and keeping employment to better improve their own household.

When working with many OWF clients and trying to find them a suitable work site for their assistance, I have personally had people say to me "why should I go get a job when I can get your welfare for free, and still be home and do as I please?" My answer is usually the same...because you will provide better for your children. Your children will have a better opportunity in their life." I strongly believe that we need to make our young people who likely will **not** succeed without family intervention from us our top priority in Darke County and across the State of Ohio. Drug testing of OWF recipients is one way of assisting with that.

Thank you for your time.