

Good Morning Chairperson Crawford and Committee Members:

My name is Lisa McCormick and I am the Director of the Children's Ombudsman's office. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding HB 4704-4709.

I have reviewed the audit findings regarding the commencement of an investigation and the concern the auditors addressed in their findings.

Regarding HB 4705, the bill requires contact with each child in the household within the first 24 hours. Contact is not defined. What does a contact mean to you? Does contact mean an email, does it mean a face to face with each child? Does it mean contact with the reporting source? What is a meaningful contact to check on the well-being of a child? I would advocate to you based on my 20 years' experience as a Prosecutor and having worked these types of cases that contact means seeing the child because under the bill you are required to check on each child's well-being. In a practical application of this language there are multiple barriers, I would argue in each and every case, that would make this contact virtually impossible to accomplish in the first 24 hours.

I do not believe that this language takes into consideration the geographical location of some counties and the amount of time it takes to contact each child in the household. I ask you to consider if a complaint comes in during the summer and the children are not in school. One child could be at the house, another child could be with a grandparent in the UP, another child could be at overnight camp in an unknown location. It might be impossible to check on the well-being of all three children within the first 24 hours. This is just one example of many situations that might develop when there is an investigation of these types of cases. Also, If the parent is the alleged perpetrator or if the perpetrator is unknown, there is an inherent need for a strategic approach to that investigation that involves numerous agencies.

Lastly, I would urge you to consider worker safety and current staffing levels. There is no standard situation in these investigations and every situation has different very dynamic moving parts. Some families are new to the system others have been in the system for years. A worker may have no idea what they are walking into. In many instances researching prior history is invaluable to the field. This can be time consuming. If the worker bypasses an initial step of conducting a prior history review in order to meet the 24-hour requirement I would be concerned that investigations will be handled with missing information. This could result in not only putting the CPS worker's safety at risk but could end up having detrimental results to children.

House Bill 4707

Regarding HB 4707, I support every county having an individualized local protocol that works with their county practices. The elected Prosecutor is the Chief Law enforcement officer for each county, and it is my opinion that the Prosecutor needs to take the lead in establishing a local protocol that best suits the needs for each respective county.

Regarding HB 4708 which addresses the addition of a group of care providers known as 'unlicensed' or 'license exempt' to the Central Registry when appropriate. It is my understanding that the program now refers to this group as Licensed Exempt. This includes related and unrelated caregivers. I believe that this legislation will ensure that 'license exempt' related caregivers are placed on central registry if appropriate. It is my understanding that the licensed exempt unrelated caregiver is currently placed on the registry if appropriate. I do support this legislation regarding the related caregiver because it is consistent with how unrelated caregivers are treated. I would urge the committee to look at the entire Central Registry legislation to determine the its effectiveness. The legislation which created the central registry was enacted over 25 years ago. I believe there is value in looking at the effectiveness of the legislation which created the central registry to determine if it is working as intended.