

Thursday, March 11, 2021  
Ohio Senate  
Government Oversight and Reform Committee  
Testimony on HB 4

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Good Morning. My name is Jessica Camargo. I am a member of ACTION Ohio which is an alumni group of former foster youth who are dedicated to improving outcomes for the next generation. I am here to offer a unique perspective as a former foster youth and a licensed practicing attorney.

As a child, I experienced unimaginable physical abuse. I know what is like to be hit with a pancake turner, wooden spoon, switch, belt, and electrical cords. I know what is like to have your head smashed so hard into a wall that it leaves holes. I know what it is like to be sat on and punched. I know what it is like to be hog tied, stripped, and left to sleep in your own urine because you were beat so bad that you just could not hold it. I know what it is like to have to miss school so you can put tea bags and cold frozen vegetables on your bruised face in hopes you can go to school the next day. I am not going to apologize for making people feel uncomfortable today, because I feel uncomfortable without cross-reporting between law enforcement and public children service agencies.

Today, I am a licensed practicing attorney. My occupation alone makes me a mandatory reporter of child abuse under Ohio Law. I am a Guardian ad Litem. For those of you that do not know what that is, let me tell you. As a licensed attorney I get to represent children everyday that have been abused, neglected, and dependent. The court asks me to make recommendations as to the best interest of these children. It breaks my heart that even as I speak today, there are children on my caseload that literally are fighting for their lives due to abuse, neglect, or dependency. They may not make it.

Approximately three years ago, Ohio was the only state that did not require police officers to be mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect. This was an incredible oversight in the law. I advocated here to change that too, and the Ohio legislature rose to occasion and on March 19, 2021, when Ohio Police Officers became mandatory reporters of child abuse. I am asking you to rise up and make a necessary change today.

The PCSAO Factbook states that the #1 reason that children and teens enter foster care in the state of Ohio is physical abuse. Those are only the children that we know about.

Throughout any profession there are good and there are bad. Throughout my life, I have had the pleasure of meeting some of the most amazing social workers and they are changing lives. I have met some fantastic officers, and I am even lucky enough to be married to one. However, we cannot be blind to the fact, that not everyone in a profession has the same standards or deep sense of ethical or moral responsibility. Thus, mandating cross-reporting is necessary to keep those police officers and social workers accountable. Mandatory cross-reporting is also necessary to prevent further child abuse and save the lives of our youth.

I respectfully request that you hear my plea today and pass this bill. I appreciate your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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