



43RD DISTRICT
STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 30014
LANSING, MI 48909-7514

MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ANDREA K. SCHROEDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

PHONE: (517) 373-0615
FAX: (517) 373-7512
AndreaSchroeder@house.mi.gov

Testimony

To: House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors
From: Rep. Andrea Schroeder
Subject: HB 5249 – “Children’s Advocates Package”
Date: March 4, 2020

Thank you Chairwoman Crawford and Committee Members,

I apologize for not being able to attend committee to testify in person. I would like to first thank Representative Hall for his leadership on this issue. Now, I am humbly asking you to consider supporting this legislation to reform our Children’s Ombudsman Act. This legislation will allow Michigan Children’s Ombudsman investigators to dedicate more resources to cases where child abuse is suspected while improving transparency and accountability.

The legislation is in response to the April 2019 audit which found the Children’s Ombudsman office was not investigating a large percentage of child abuse cases because mandates related to child fatality cases were eating up too many of the agency’s resources. The solution to this problem is to reclassify some child death cases so the agency can devote more resources to protecting Michigan’s children.

It is always a terrible tragedy when a child dies. The family, child, and state all deserve justice by ensuring a complete investigation takes place. This legislation is not changing the devotion to serving justice, but only streamlining the process for the caseworkers and families. Our bills will allow for a preliminary investigation into cases when a child dies while in foster care, recently left foster care, or was involved in a child protective services case. The ombudsman’s office will determine whether a full investigation is required after the mandatory preliminary investigation is concluded on a case-by-case basis – allowing cases where a child has died from natural causes, for example, to be closed after the preliminary investigation. The change will allow the ombudsman’s

office to complete mandated investigations efficiently, focusing resources on cases where abuse is suspected more quickly, and sparing families from lengthy investigations in cases where a child has died of natural causes.

As you are all aware from Chair Hall's testimony, there are systematic issues with the Ombudsman's office that we must correct as soon as possible to protect our most vulnerable population: abused and neglected *children*. These bills are meant to clarify our laws and implement reforms to ensure our children are safe and in healthier environments.

As legislators and advocates, we can all agree that protecting our children is the number one priority here and ensuring the ombudsman office has the proper tools and guidelines to do so is imperative. I believe after our hearings and meetings with the department, these reforms are the best way to achieve that goal.