

# The Supreme Court of Ohio

65 SOUTH FRONT STREET, COLUMBUS, OH 43215-3431



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## MEDIA RELEASE

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COLUMBUS - Huron County has been selected to join in the innovative Ohio Alternative Response Pilot Project that will provide another tool to child protection agencies for working with children and families in trouble, the Supreme Court of Ohio and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) have announced. Adding Huron County and nine others will bring the total number of counties participating in the pilot project to 25.

The 10 counties selected to participate in the pilot project include: Ashtabula, Athens, Coshocton, Erie, Hamilton, Hocking, Huron, Mahoning, Medina and Washington. The 15 counties currently participating include: Champaign, Clark, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Guernsey, Licking, Lucas, Madison, Montgomery, Richland, Ross, Summit, Trumbull and Tuscarawas.

The American Humane Association, along with the Institute of Applied Research and Minnesota leaders (AIM), worked with Ohio to design and implement the pilot. The institute conducted an independent evaluation and found that under a rigorous randomized control trial of 4,822 families over an 18-month period, the "alternative response" practice is safe for children and beneficial to families and caseworkers.

During the pilot, caseworkers used alternative response to respond to anywhere from 25 to 50 percent of all reports of abuse and neglect. Instead of conducting a traditional family assessment, they responded with an "alternative family assessment response," in which they assessed the needs of the child or family in a non-threatening, non-adversarial manner and then offered services to meet those needs.

"The results of the alternative response evaluation of our pilot project have shown that the traditional family assessment is not the only way to keep children safe." said Steve Hanson, who manages the Supreme Court Children, Families & the Courts Program. "States currently using this model report that families on the assessment track are less likely to experience a recurrence of child maltreatment. This also results in lower court caseloads."

Since 2004, the Supreme Court's Advisory Committee on Children, Families & the Courts has participated in ongoing efforts to develop and implement recommendations to improve Ohio's system for accepting and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. One of the fundamental components of the recommendations submitted by its Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect & Dependency was initiating an "alternative response" child protection model. In 2006, the legislature authorized the pilot project, which operates as a joint effort by the Supreme Court and ODJFS.

Alternative response is a form of practice in child protective services that allows for more than one method of response to accepted reports of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. This approach recognizes the variation in the nature of reports and the related value of responding differentially, either a traditional investigation or a family assessment response. A family assessment response assesses the needs of the child or family and offers services without requiring a formal disposition (substantiation) that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment.

"Alternative response acknowledges that families have unique needs and that caseworkers need the flexibility to use a variety of tools and strategies to respond to a range of situations," said ODJFS Director Douglas Lumpkin. "Alternative response builds collaborative connections among the child protection agency, community agencies and families to identify issues and meet families' needs using available supports and services."

The Alternative Response Project began in April 2007, when a team of consultants collectively named the "AIM Team" were selected to manage the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. Ten original pilot counties were selected to help design and implement an Ohio alternative response program. The 10 pilot counties were joined earlier this year by five additional counties that are participating in a national study of the approach.

The lead partner in the "AIM Team" is the American Humane Association, a national nonprofit organization focused on protecting both children and animals from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Working in tandem with AHA is the Institute of Applied Research, an independent, nonprofit research and consulting firm based in St. Louis, Mo., as well as several consultants from Minnesota who brought state- and county-level expertise in the design, implementation and testing of alternative response, having developed their own nationally regarded alternative response protocol.

Casey Family Programs, Ohio Children Trust Fund joined the project as partners in 2008. As the nation's largest operating foundation entirely focused on foster care, the Casey Family Programs recognized the potential for alternative response to safely reduce the number of children requiring foster care, one of the organization's national goals. Both organizations have provided funding to support county implementation of the alternative response approach.

For more information about the Alternative Response Pilot Project and evaluation visit:  
<http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/programs/differential-response/ohio-alternative-response.html>.

Huron County Contact: Trista Piccola at 419.668.8126, ext 3200

Supreme Court of Ohio Contact: Chris Davey at 614.387.9250

Ohio Department of Job & Family Services Contact: Ben Johnson at 614.466.9824