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**Interested Party Testimony on Amended Sub. HB 49  
Janet Hales, Director and Linda Cook, Senior Attorney  
Ohio Poverty Law Center**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony.

The budget released on April 25<sup>th</sup> contains several important workforce investments and provisions. The Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC) advocates for policies that increase opportunities for Ohioans living, working, and raising their children in poverty. Many of these same Ohioans receive SNAP assistance and would welcome the opportunity to get training and education for jobs that provide a way out of poverty.

**SNAP E & T**

We were excited to see an investment in SNAP E & T in the budget released on April 25<sup>th</sup>. The mission of the SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E & T) program is to provide employer-driven employment and training programs to SNAP-eligible individuals. When used for eligible activities, Ohio could double its investment and help thousands of Ohioans.

OPLC is particularly interested in the budget investment for two reasons: First, we have been advocating for increased use of SNAP E & T, ourselves and with Advocates for Ohio's Future, for expanded use of the SNAP E & T 50/50 funds as a vehicle for increasing opportunities for people in need of education and training (see attached for more information); and, second, the U.S. Department of Agriculture selected OPLC as one of 34 organizations across the country to participate in the first SNAP E & T Academy. The SNAP E & T Academy was established "to provide an opportunity for 34 individuals to gain technical expertise on SNAP E&T that prepares them to work within their State or across multiple States building job-driven SNAP E&T programs".<sup>1</sup> The Academy's efforts "are designed to develop effective and high-quality SNAP E&T programs in [each participant's] State or across multiple States." As part of this Academy, OPLC will be able to work with administrative officials on the state and county level to share best practices and serve as a resource. OPLC will be developing a resource map project that – based on similar projects in other states – could identify millions of dollars qualifying for the SNAP E & T 50/50 match. We hope that legislators and administrative officials will consider us as a partner in building job-driven programs that help SNAP recipients gain skills and education that will equip them for family-supporting jobs.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/news-events/fns-announces-2017-snap-et-academy-participants> Participants include community colleges, hunger coalitions, state advocacy organizations, local workforce boards, national nonprofits, providers and State SNAP agencies and all will work on individual SNAP E&T projects.

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## **Short-Term Certificate Programs**

The \$5 million funding expanding Ohio College Opportunity Grant eligibility in FY 19 for short term certificate programs is also an important investment in employment and training. While this is a significant opportunity for both employers and low-income Ohioans, this funding should be monitored carefully to ensure it supports programs that move people into well-paying, in-demand jobs and provides the support needed to its participants to be successful.

## **Workforce Development**

### **A. Measuring the effectiveness of moving people off assistance**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 134(c)(3)(E) gives priority for receipt of career and training services to recipients of public assistance, other low income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. This section also requires the Governor to direct the one-stop operators regarding how to implement this priority of service. The Ohio Poverty Law Center and its direct service legal aid partners have consistently urged Job and Family Services and the Office of Workforce Transformation both to specifically define what it means to provide priority of service and to set a benchmark percentage level of 70% as the number of adult participants within these priority populations that will receive services.

Defining priority of service and setting benchmarks for service are necessary components for determining the effectiveness of workforce programs in transitioning individuals into unsubsidized employment. Ohio needs programs that are both effective in transitioning individual job seekers into unsubsidized employment as well as capable of addressing the demand for these services in a population with challenges and barriers to employment. The States which have a benchmark have increased employment opportunities for people previously not served by the workforce system.

### **B. Allowing Workforce Boards to conduct meetings by video and teleconference**

Ohio's Workforce Boards could potentially be one of the most powerful agents in reducing poverty in communities across Ohio. While they are statutorily required to be composed of over 50 % employers, workforce boards are perfectly positioned to target education and training programs to meet their own needs and the needs of their communities and regions. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which provides funding for these boards, requires that the boards and their partners prioritize people with barriers to employment, which includes several categories of people, including people with low skills and education, displaced homemakers, and other people most in need – but often left behind - in workforce training and education. In advocating for evidence-based workforce policies that will result in more low-income people in career pathways, we have observed that the workforce boards, with few exceptions, make it quite difficult for citizens to provide input. Notices of meetings, if posted at all, are not readily accessible on websites, nor are public comment periods posted beyond rudimentary newspaper postings. The ability to conduct meetings by video and teleconference will further restrict public access to this critical component of economic development made possible by public funds – when members of the public could offer solutions not yet considered. Moreover, WIOA encourages more, not less, public involvement in workforce planning.



## **SNAP Employment & Training: Resources to Meet Employers' Needs and Expand Employment Opportunities for Job Seekers with Low Incomes and Skill Levels**

All people deserve the opportunity to succeed in work so that they can support themselves and their families. In Ohio, employers often report that they cannot find enough skilled workers to fill jobs. SNAP E&T funding and programs can help solve this challenge by training participants for jobs that are in demand in their local labor markets.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAPE&T), is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). When used to its full potential, SNAP E&T helps people with low incomes to enhance their job skills, credentials, careers, and, ultimately, their families' financial well-being. By helping more people gain skills and credentials, SNAP E&T programs help provide employers with the skilled workforce they need while helping workers succeed and become self-sufficient.

### **What SNAP E&T Can Do for Ohio**

This is the perfect time to use the SNAP E&T program to build on the strengths and experience of existing workforce development efforts in Ohio. Combining additional SNAP E&T with Ohio's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs would increase the resources necessary to meet employers' needs and broaden Ohioans' access to skill-building opportunities and family-sustaining employment.

#### **1. By accessing 50–50 SNAP E&T funds, Ohio will leverage workforce training to meet employers' needs and provide a pathway for Ohioans to move out of poverty**

SNAP E&T has two primary types of funding. States are required to utilize SNAP E&T Program Grants, which are formula-based grants received by all states to pay for SNAP E&T administrative expenses: state staffing and overall planning, implementation, operation, and partner providers' administrative expenses. The grant funds may also be used to pay for direct program expenses like tuition and fees, case management/career navigation, and job development. These grants provide 100% funding.

Ohio could access additional support for job and skill training by accessing SNAP Fifty Percent Reimbursement Grants (50-50 funds) These grants would reimburse 50 cents per every dollar Ohio spends on SNAP E&T program costs exceeding those covered by 100% E&T program grants. 50-50

reimbursement can be used for vital supportive services essential to job success, including transportation, child care, books, and supplies.

Ohio has relied almost exclusively on its 100% program grant. New and job-driven E & T programs could be funded by utilizing the full potential of flexible 50-50 SNAP match funds. Other states have built impactful, job-driven programs with 50-50 SNAP grants.

### **Investing in SNAP E&T for Ohio's Future**

Ohio should invest in SNAP E&T and begin building a skill-based program with these components:

1. Make effective use of 100 percent funds at the state and county levels to build capacity to plan, develop, operate, and monitor an expanded program.
2. Map available resources and providers in the state to identify successful training that matches employer needs and non-federal dollars already being spent that could be reimbursed through the SNAP 50-50 grant funds.
3. Build upon established relationships with employers and successful employment and training programs in Ohio's workforce system.
4. Start with smaller pilot programs that are either limited in geographic scope or eligible population.

By taking full advantage of SNAP 50-50 funding, Ohio could establish itself as a leader in workforce development and increase opportunities for Ohio's 1,610,012 SNAP participants<sup>1</sup> – 13.05% of our state's population – who must rely on SNAP benefits because they are underemployed or unemployed. Additional SNAP E & T will increase our ability to meet employers' needs for skilled and trained employees, which will strengthen Ohio's economy. SNAP's E & T funding is a great opportunity for Ohio to make a reasonable investment that will grow our economy and reduce poverty at the same time.

### **Helpful Resources**

USDA Employment and Training Tool Kit:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ET\\_Toolkit\\_2013.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ET_Toolkit_2013.pdf)

USDA SNAP to Skills Resource Page:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap-skills>

National Skills Coalition SNAP Employment and Training Resource Page:

<http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policy/snap-employment-and-training>

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Public Assistance Monthly Statistics Report:

<https://jfs.ohio.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147644368>

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, April 2016.