

Testimony of Jeffrey A. Diver
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I wish to thank Dr. Phil DeVol for agreeing to highlight my testimony at your committee hearing today:

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and Committee Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services: I am Jeffrey Diver, executive director of Supports to Encourage Low-income Families (also called SELF), Butler County's state-designated Community Action Agency.

SELF is one of 48 non-profit Community Action Agencies in Ohio, covering all 88 counties, which are focused on helping low-income Ohio families achieve and sustain self-sufficiency. Each Community Action Agency is locally controlled (one third of the members of their boards of directors have to be publicly elected officials) and focuses on unique anti-poverty efforts based on regular community needs assessments. In Butler County, SELF addresses poverty through programs including:

- A comprehensive employment effort, called JOBS NOW! More than 1,500 residents have gained employment in the agency's history. We provide the employment education (soft skills), interview clothing, temporary transportation, job leads and even a laptop computer for those actively working on their goals.
- A financial literacy and matched (\$2 for every \$1) savings program, called Individual Development Accounts (IDA), for acquiring a home, business or education. More than \$1.3 million

dollars in assets have been acquired in the seven years of the program.

- A microenterprise and microloan program that has helped 58 low- and moderate-income entrepreneurs launch small businesses.
- A construction training program for at-risk young adults, called Build-Up Academy, where participants earn two industry recognized credentials, and 80 percent of graduates become employed.
- A transformative program for moving families off government assistance, called Getting Ahead, which is based on the Bridges Out of Poverty work, co-authored by Phil DeVol. In one year alone, 24 of SELF's participants in this program have reduced their emergency social service usage and have gotten off government assistance. SELF is conducting Getting Ahead currently in three locations, including an inpatient program for pregnant women who have opioid addiction.

The common element in all of SELF's programs is holistic, also known as "comprehensive," case management. While clients set goals and are provided education and training, they are also provided wrap around emergency supports and connective referrals to ensure success. Most importantly is the staff compassion and coaching that help families when "life happens" and they hit bumps in the road on the way to reaching their goals.

I am submitting this testimony in support of funding for continuation of the Ohio Healthier Buckeye Project for two more years. Through this project and the creation of the Butler County Healthier Buckeye Council, profound changes are occurring in Butler County. Central to that success is the focus on the Bridges Out of Poverty framework and the expansion of the Getting Ahead Program. The individualized efforts

for each participant of the Getting Ahead program are leading to success in moving families off government assistance and out of poverty.

The Butler County Healthier Buckeye Council helps to coordinate services among physical health, behavioral health, social, employment, education, and housing service providers within the county.

Coordination (and collaboration) is leading to greater successes in serving low-income Ohioans and helping them to find and retain employment to support their families. It is also saving taxpayer dollars through the collaboration of organizations and the reduction of government assistance for participants of the Getting Ahead program.

Butler County's Healthier Buckeye Council addresses three core issues in helping low-income individuals achieve and maintain self-sufficiency:

- Improving the understanding by service providers and the community of the culture of poverty and the true root causes.
- Recruiting, training and supporting mentors and volunteers that can model self-sufficiency and help clients reduce reliance on public assistance.
- Creating and coordinating pathways for people to move out of poverty.

The Ohio Healthier Buckeye funding is providing an opportunity for the Butler County community to work together to design and build a broader bridge out of poverty where partners are able to better *educate, empower and encompass* our clients and community in a new model for sustained self-sufficiency. In fact, one senior official of the Butler County Department of Job and Family services reports that this project is inspiring the department as it refines its processes and outreach.

In addition to the county Job and Family Services offices, Butler County Healthier Buckeye Council members include: SELF as the lead agency; Butler County Children Services and six other county organizations; five nonprofits; and one for-profit organization.

In less than one year, the accomplishments to date of the Butler County Healthier Buckeye Council are:

- Building collaboration between the county agencies and nonprofit organizations to offer supportive services to enhance client awareness of self-sufficiency and parenting issues.
- Expanding the number of community members and county employees who are trained in the framework of Bridges Out of Poverty - 275 have attended.
- Expanding the number certified trainers in the Bridges Out of Poverty framework - 46 have been trained.
- Completing six Getting Ahead self-sufficiency classes - completed 6 sessions, serving 33 clients. Three more sessions began in January.
- Conducting six community outreach events in low-income areas of Butler County to reach candidates for the Healthier Buckeye efforts. Approximately 250 individuals have attended.
- Conducting multi-generational programming for parents and teens. Twelve families have completed the program to date with a second session that began in February.
- Training five facilitators to teach Getting Ahead. All are currently teaching classes that began in January 2017.
- Holding two C.O.P.E (Cost of Poverty Experience) simulations exposing more than 150 community members to the problems, and

problem-solving skills, of those who are living in poverty. The third simulation will be held March 25.

- Hosting an “R Rules” facilitator training led by the author and program creator, Betti Souther and implementation of this program. The “R Rules” is a teen self-sufficiency and skills enrichment class designed for low-income students to develop resources that lead to high school completion, and guides students through the process of developing and achieving goals focused on creating an academic plan and a life and career plan. Classes will serve approximately 85 students in four school districts as well as students at the Butler County Juvenile Detention Center and One Way Farm, a residential program for abused, abandoned and neglected children.

A few specific successes in the Getting Ahead program include:

- A graduate now works as a ‘picker’ at a catalog fulfillment center, earning approximately \$12/hour. She works full-time and this has allowed her to reduce her reliance on government assistance. When she began this class, her home was in foreclosure and she was not employed.
- A graduate is now employed after nearly 10 years being unemployed and has reduced her need for food assistance.
- A graduate is now employed at SELF. She has also enrolled in school and has returned to active status with the Army.

As you can see, the Butler County Healthier Council is making a significant impact even in its short time, despite the state delays in rolling out the project in 2016.

I urge the committee to give this project two additional years funding to enable the counties who received the grant to continue to grow their efforts, helping individuals leave government assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to you today.