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**Ohio Poverty Law Center  
Graham Bowman, Staff Attorney  
Substitute House Bill 166  
House Finance Committee  
May 7, 2019**

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony as an interested party on HB166. My name is Graham Bowman and I am a staff attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center.

The Ohio Poverty Law Center's mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty. Drawing on the day-to-day experiences of the legal aid attorneys who provide civil legal services to low-income Ohioans in every county, we are supporting and requesting investments and policy changes that will improve the lives of low-income Ohioans.

We thank you for many investments in HB166 that support Ohioans living in poverty and struggling to support their families. In particular, we appreciate the additional resources for the public children services agencies and wrap around mental health services in schools. We also thank you for supporting the Governor's proposals to prevent and combat lead poisoning.

We are encouraged by the new provision in Substitute HB166 that would require the state to pursue a waiver to enhance the state's ability to address social determinants of health through the Medicaid program. Research shows that the majority of a person's health outcomes are determined by non-medical factors. Allowing the Medicaid program greater flexibility to address these factors will greatly enhance the efficacy and efficiency of the Medicaid program over the long run.

Despite the enormous good in this budget, we would like to highlight some areas where more can be done to help low-income Ohioans.

**State Earned Income Tax Credit**

We thank you for expanding the state EITC that was in the transportation budget. The Earned Income Tax Credit is a broadly popular method of rewarding work, supplementing low-income workers wages, and offsetting the disproportionate amount of their income that goes to sales and local taxes. We ask that this committee take the additional step of making the state EITC refundable. Unless the credit is made refundable, the other reforms benefit only an additional one percent of Ohio's lowest income families, according to an analysis from the Institute for Tax and Economic Policy.

**SNAP Employment and Training Federal Match**

There are a wide range of in-demand jobs that would increase the earning potential of low-income Ohioans if they received the right training and supports including new lead abatement specialists.

Ohio's able-bodied adult Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients are required to work or participate in a training program. Ohio has an opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program in Ohio and draw down a federal dollars to match a community's investment.

We know that high quality education and training can lead to meaningful employment opportunities. Without planning and investment, too often SNAP recipients are only able to fulfil the requirements by mowing grass at their JFS office or perform absurd activities to meet the requirement. Our legal aid colleagues have told us stories of clients being required to sort and re-sort a pile of red and blue pen caps. Another client was asked to paint a pile of rocks white. These "work programs" are not the local JFS office's fault. They lack resources.

Federal dollars are available to reimburse state, local, and private investments in SNAP E&T programs at a rate of \$1 for every \$2 spent. These are called SNAP 50/50 funds. However, Ohio draws down very few of these dollars because neither the state nor county JFS agencies have the administrative capacity to enter into contracts with quality workforce development providers on a large scale.

We ask that this committee fully support the Department of Job and Family Services budget requests regarding workforce development, which will support a new initiative to draw down 50/50 funds for partnerships with community colleges. **In addition, we ask that an additional \$4 million in each fiscal year be added to the ODJFS budget to develop the administrative capacity to draw down additional 50/50 funds throughout the state, to support a much wider range of potential SNAP Employment and Training providers, and to create new programs in underserved areas.**

This investment will create capacity throughout the state for community-based non-profits, community colleges, workforce development agencies, and employment-related support service providers to draw down an uncapped amount of federal reimbursements for investments they are already making using existing state, local, and private dollars. Over time the amount of uncapped federal reimbursement drawn down to local communities will vastly outweigh the initial capacity-building investment we are asking for today.

### **TANF's OWF Monthly Benefit**

The core of the TANF program is: (1) a cash assistance to needy families, known as Ohio Works First (OWF) benefits, and (2) non-recurrent emergency benefits, known as the Prevention Retention and Contingency Program (PRC), have withered over time.

Enrollment in OWF has decreased and PRC benefits have become increasingly difficult for enrollees to access over the past twenty years. At the same time, the state has chronically under spent its federal TANF grant block grant during that same time period.

This annual underspending is why there exists such a large TANF reserve. While we support the proposed investment of these dollars in child care, it is important to point out that the reserves exist because the money was not being spent on benefits for needy families in sufficient amounts in the past.

While the reserves built up in the past are being allocated, there is nothing in the TANF spending plan that will alleviate future underspending in the next two fiscal years.

In this context, we ask for your support for an increase the Ohio Works First benefit by \$100 per month for all family sizes who receive cash assistance that is intended to help very poor families

Raising the monthly benefit amount by \$100 will help the poorest Ohio families and will ensure that TANF dollars are being used to support the core tenants of the program.