



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Sub HB 166, Main Operating Budget FY2020-FY2021
Interested Party Testimony
House Finance - May 7, 2019

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld, and I am the Coalition Manager of Advocates for Ohio's Future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Sub House Bill 166, the main operating budget.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a nonpartisan coalition of nearly 500 organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so that all Ohioans live better lives. Our coalition believes in investing in our state's most valuable resource—our people—to ensure that they are safe, healthy, and can access pathways to prosperity for themselves and their families.

We applaud Governor DeWine's recognition that investing in Ohio builds a better future. This budget includes important investments in Ohioans and Ohio communities which will promote and support family stability and self-sufficiency.

We are glad that the Governor and the House have fully funded the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Medicaid Expansion, which provide health care to hundreds of thousands of low wage workers and their children. The tens of thousands of jobs supported by the federal dollars those programs bring into Ohio strengthen the health care system and the economy in every community of Ohio.

The resources included Sub HB 166 effectively respond to the addiction and mental illness public health crisis facing our state. AOF also looks forward to working collaboratively with policy makers and other stakeholders to help advance the important recommendations outlined in the initial [RecoveryOhio Advisory Council Report](#). We are encouraged to see that the House has added support to the governor's investment in stemming the infant mortality crisis. Thank you for that important investment.

We are encouraged by Sub HB 166's instructions for the Medicaid Director to establish a Medicaid waiver component that addresses social determinants of health, including housing, transportation, food, interpersonal safety, and toxic stress. We know the conditions in which we live and access to social and economic opportunities play a major role in a person's overall physical and mental health. Ohio ranks [46th among the states in health value](#), which means that Ohioans are less healthy and spend more on health care than people in most other states. This is largely because of many missed upstream opportunities to prevent or better manage injury, illness and disability for thousands of Ohioans. While Sub HB 166 boosts investment in some social determinants of health, deeper investment is needed in early care and education, protective services for seniors, direct aid and job training for the poorest families, public transportation funding and refundability for the earned income tax credit.

While we acknowledge and appreciate the investments and initiatives within the budget, more can be done to truly improve the lives of children and families in this state. In order to make meaningful investments in our

future, we suggest the following proposals for inclusion in the bill that will invest in our children, strengthen Ohio's families and communities, and increase opportunity for Ohioans across our state.

Increased funding for Adult Protective Services

We are pleased to see additional investments made for adult protective services (APS). Now, more than ever, older Ohioans face the prospect of elder abuse in the form of financial exploitation from scam artists, friends or family and the grim prospect of suffering physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Older adults more often find themselves in situations of neglect, or self-neglect, which can result in deterioration of physical and mental health.

For these and many other reasons, **we ask that funding for APS be increased in the ODJFS budget (line item 600534) from \$4.23 million each year of the biennium to \$10 million each year of the biennium.** At current budget levels, each county receives around \$30,000 for APS. Sub HB 166 provides for around \$48,000 per county. Our proposed increase would provide \$65,000 per county in Ohio, enough to fund one full time APS caseworker, plus an additional amount to be distributed to counties on a yet to be determined formula. We believe this investment will provide a better spectrum of services for older adults to live safe and healthy lives in their communities and in facilities.

While we are thankful for many of the investments and initiatives within the budget, more can be done to truly improve the lives of children and families in this state. In order to make meaningful investments in our future, we suggest the following proposals for inclusion in the bill that will invest in our children, strengthen Ohio's families and communities, and increase opportunity for Ohioans across our state.

Eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care

We thank Governor DeWine and the House for continuing to move forward with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as that agency restores [quality](#) and boosts investment in the structure of Ohio's publicly funded childcare program.

We are disappointed that Sub HB 166 does not include new GRF funding to expand access to child care by **increasing the level of initial eligibility to the Governor's promise of 150 percent of poverty; the goal of AOF is to see initial eligibility for public child care assistance restored to [200 percent of poverty](#)** and fully aligned with the public preschool program, allowing thousands of children and families to take advantage of enrichment programs for early learners while supporting low-income working parents.

The important investments we see in this budget - and the investments necessary to improve the system - should be supported by predictable and sustainable state-based funding now, and in the future.

Ohio Works First

Ohio Works First is the financial assistance portion of the state's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, which provides cash benefits to needy families for up to 36 months.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant is designed to provide temporary financial assistance to poor families, primarily those with no other means to meet basic needs. But since TANF's creation in 1996, its reach has [declined dramatically](#).

To be eligible for OWF cash assistance, applicants must have a minor child or pregnant woman (at least six months pregnant) in the assistance group. Families must also have incomes of no more than 50% of the FPL (about \$10,000 annually for a family of three in 2019).

The majority of those receiving OWF in Ohio today are child-only cases, minor children that are being cared for and who are living with guardians and relatives, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and even older siblings.

Assistance Group Size	OWF Payment
1	\$ 289.00
2	\$ 395.00
3	\$ 483.00
4	\$ 596.00

According to data from the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2016, only about nine out of 100 families receiving Ohio Works First (OWF) had income beyond cash assistance. Declining caseloads in Ohio, and nationally, mean that fewer and fewer families can purchase essentials, tooth paste, shampoo, laundry soap, diapers or feminine hygiene products, because they no longer have access to cash support offered by OWF.

For these reasons and the future of our children and our great state, we request this committee’s consideration and 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 poor families.

Food Assistance

Sub HB 166 has missed the mark as it relates to nutritional needs of very poor children and their families who have been left out and left behind. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks released the [2019 Map the Meal Gap](#) report last week. The study found that Ohio’s food insecurity rate of 14.5 percent is much higher than the national rate (12.5 percent) and the Midwestern average (11.4 percent). The study also found that about half of all food insecure Ohioans live in households that earn too much to qualify for help from SNAP. For those 829,000 people, food pantries and soup kitchens are the only safety net they have.

Hunger affects the lives of more than 1 in 7 Ohioans - including 1 in 5 children who don’t always have access to the food they need to meet their basic needs. Hunger does irreparable harm to people, communities and our state’s economy.

AOF supports the Ohio Association of Foodbanks request to provide an additional \$10 million per year in Amended Sub H.B. 166. This funding will allow them to purchase over 50 million pounds of healthy wholesome food we need to feed our hungry friends and neighbors. This request represents just \$1.25 per person, per month, who is served by the statewide network.

Ohio can do more, and support for this amendment is the necessary approach to helping protect the lives of Ohio’s hungry children, seniors and families, strengthening our communities, and preserving the state’s health and economic future.

Maternal Mortality

Our partners at the [Center for Community Solutions](#) have worked for the past year to bring attention to the lack of timely reporting and information on pregnancy-associated deaths in Ohio. The most recent data (from 2014) available for Ohio shows that between 2008 and 2014 there were 408 pregnancy-associated deaths.

There was language included in the as-introduced budget that intended to move toward strengthening data and reporting on this issue. This language was removed in the substitute bill and we recommend reinserting it through the omnibus amendment, with some changes that would codify Ohio’s Pregnancy Associated Mortality Review (PAMR) committee and require more frequent reporting of the committee’s overall findings.

There is time sensitivity to including this language in the budget bill. Once there is statutory language defining the committee and its work, Ohio will be eligible to apply for federal funds to support the state’s PAMR. **We**

recommend formally establishing this committee and giving it the tools it needs to pull in timely and quality data on maternal deaths to be reported on an annual basis. This is key to a complete and strong application for federal funding, and is an important first step toward implementing measures to improve maternal health and wellbeing.

State Earned Income Tax Credit

AOF lauds lawmakers' recent improvements to the EITC. The EITC rewards work and makes a real difference for low income families. However, [refundability](#) is the most powerful aspect of the EITC. Reforms made to the EITC in the transportation budget will be helpful to some families of modest income, but will not help the 20 percent of Ohio families with the lowest incomes, who need assistance the most.

We encourage the General Assembly to make Ohio's EITC refundable, which is the only approach they can take to income tax policy that will help the poorest Ohio families.

State infrastructure for the 2020 U.S. Census

Ohio is less than a year away from the [2020 Census](#) count. Though the administration has taken several steps toward enacting a plan for census efforts, Ohio is significantly behind in developing state and local Complete Count Commissions and coordinating efforts to ensure every person in every corner of our state is appropriately counted. An inaccurate count could mean the loss of a Congressional representative, and losses to the more than \$33.5 billion of federal funding distributed to Ohio based on the Census for important programs like highway planning and construction, Medicaid, housing, SNAP, foster care, business loans, and more.

Sub HB 166 does not allocate funds dedicated to educational and accuracy efforts in hard to reach communities or fund dedicated DSA employees to staff the Complete Count Commission and coordinate agency efforts. Currently, proposed federal resources for the Census are estimated to be \$2 billion less than recommended.

We ask this committee commit \$2.65 million in GRF to ensure each Ohioan is counted for the equitable and accurate distribution of public funds and the preservation of Ohio's representation in Congress.

Public Transit

The General Assembly appropriated \$70 million GRF dollars in the Transportation Budget for public transit. Between that appropriation and the \$6.5 million in the operating budget, state funding is almost level with what it was in 2016-17 biennium, before the state narrowed the sales tax by taking the Medicaid Managed Care Organization tax out of the state base, upon which transit agencies can levy a sales tax. We are glad to see transit is almost made whole in Sub HB 166, but much more needs to be done. According to the 2015 [Statewide Transit Needs study](#), the state should have started investing \$125 million a year in 2015, rising to \$185 million by 2025, to meet public transit needs in Ohio - far more than what is appropriated in the transportation budget and the operating budget.

SNAP E&T 50/50 Reimbursement "SNAP to Skills"

Most adults receiving SNAP benefits are subject to an Employment and Training (E&T) requirement. SNAP recipients may fulfill their E&T requirement by participating in either: (1) a work experience program (WEP), (2) employment and training activities, which may include either basic education or vocational training, or (3) job search/readiness programming.

Any provider of E&T programming, and related supportive services, can receive a 50 percent reimbursement from the federal government if their services were not initially provided using federal dollars. This is called the SNAP E&T 50/50 program. In Ohio, existing non-profits, workforce development agencies, community colleges and other entities provide these services and could benefit from the 50 percent reimbursement.

Unfortunately, very few of these programs are receiving federal reimbursement because Ohio has not fully incorporated SNAP E&T 50/50 into the state or county plans and does not have the infrastructure established to

administer these federal funds. As a result, many SNAP recipients across the state have faced a shortage of meaningful, quality training programs and other essential supports needed to secure and retain a living-wage job.

In order to fully utilize available federal dollars to expand access and capacity for quality E&T programs, we ask that you:

- **Invest \$4 million in GRF per year to spur development of SNAP 50-50 eligible training initiatives to encourage development of local partnerships and provide education, training, and wrap-around services to SNAP eligible trainees, and provide support to the state and county JFS agencies to build and coordinate the administrative infrastructure needed to manage the program.**
- **Convene the SNAP planning committee created in the last budget bill to discuss best practices and develop a set of recommendations for how to expand SNAP E&T 50/50 in Ohio's SNAP Plan**
- **Revise the ODJFS SNAP Employment and Training Plan to include job retention services, intended to provide support to a new hire for the first 90 days on their new job**

Though we are pleased with new initiatives and investments in job training within several agencies in Sub HB 166, we encourage the committee to consider the many existing non-profits, workforce development agencies, community colleges and other entities currently providing these services who could quickly benefit from the federal 50/50 reimbursement, expand their capacity and help more individuals on the path the self-sufficiency.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Sub HB 166. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

AOF looks forward to continuing to work with you on policies that help all Ohioans live better lives.

Kelsey Bergfeld, Coalition Manager
Advocates for Ohio's Future
175 S. Third Street Suite 350, Columbus, OH 43215
614-745-0740 ext. 305
kbergfeld@communitysolutions.com
www.advocatesforohio.org