



1108 City Park Avenue, Suite 200
Columbus, OH 43206
614.827.0549
www.ohiopovertylawcenter.org

**Ohio Poverty Law Center
Graham Bowman, Staff Attorney
House Bill 200
House Health Committee
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Testimony in Opposition to HB 200

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Health Committee, 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 oppose House Bill 200.

The prohibition against implementing ABAWD time-limit waivers will have a severe impact on economically distressed areas like Lordstown, Ohio.

The northeast Ohio community of Lordstown, located in Trumbull County, made national headlines when General Motors announced that it would close its plant on March 6, 2019.¹ The Lordstown plant is a major driver of the economy in Northeast, Ohio and its closing is having an immediate and massive ripple effect throughout the area. Cleveland State University's Center for Economic Development estimates that the closing will have a \$3 billion negative impact and the region will lose over \$12 million in tax revenues. Approximately 4,600 jobs will be lost both directly and indirectly as a result of the closing.

Despite its bleak economic future, under this bill, Trumbull County would not be able to continue its work requirement waiver. Ohio would be forced to impose work requirements on many of the county's 17,182² adult SNAP recipients at a time when businesses are shrinking or closing all together. Many former GM employees who recently lost their job would not be able to feed their families unless they quickly find jobs—jobs they are competing for against thousands of other laid off workers—or spend precious job-search time participating in “workfare” activities to work off the meager food assistance benefits they receive that are intended to keep their family stable while in crisis.

In many counties these workfare, or employment and training, programs do nothing to improve the skills or employment prospects of those participating.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/04/business/general-motors-lordstown/index.html>

² <http://jfs.ohio.gov/pams/Case-Load-Summary-Report--January.stm>

This committee should look at the quality and availability of SNAP Employment and Training programming if it wants to promote work through the SNAP program.

Ohio has an opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program in Ohio and draw down 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 performing absurd activities. For example, 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. Members of this committee could give them that capacity.

Throughout the budget process OPLC and other human services advocates have been asking that the state invest additional dollars in the SNAP Employment and Training Program to improve the quality of the program and draw down additional federal dollars.

Investing in SNAP ET 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.

This bill also requires that, as a condition of SNAP eligibility, certain individuals cooperate with ODJFS regarding (1) establishing paternity and (2) establishing, modifying, and enforcing a child support order. This policy has been extremely unpopular in other states. In the past 10 years only 10 states have attempted to implement this policy. Because of its administrative burden, of those 10, only 3 continue to implement it today.³

In 2014, Utah commissioned an independent study on the effect this policy would have on the state. The study concluded that:

- The state would experience significant impacts to systems and staff under a mandatory program. The time it would take to implement necessary changes was a major consideration.
- A mandatory program would require initial spending of \$3,202,807 to \$3,622,807.
- Under a mandatory option, it is estimated that 6.7%-37% of families will experience reductions in food stamp benefits from sanctions while only 0%-9% of families may receive child support payments

³ <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2014/pdf/00005534.pdf>

A former federal child-support commissioner, Vicki Turetsky, wrote a piece for [Governing.com](https://www.governing.com) in May 2018 about why mandatory child support cooperation policies in SNAP were a bad idea.⁴ She argues that “Mandating child-support-program participation would force child-support agencies to create a new bureaucratic infrastructure to identify SNAP recipients and manage, track and monitor these cases. They also would have to create a process for determining when parents should be exempted from participation to protect the more than one in five single parents who experience domestic violence.”

The implications of this policy for domestic violence victims are substantial. According to Ms. Turetsky, “Some families don't pursue child support for other reasons. Domestic-violence survivors may fear that it would put them or their children at risk; a staggering 43 percent of single mothers who do not receive any child-support are victims of abuse, according to a University of Texas study.⁵ Grandparents temporarily caring for children may fear that a parent pursued for child-support wouldn't allow the child to remain with them; the opioid-abuse crisis has forced many grandparents to become caregivers, but pursuing child support is unlikely to be productive in such cases. And family instability and health issues can make it hard for many families to navigate the bureaucratic process.”

We should not force all families to pursue child support in order to receive SNAP benefits. Sometimes, there are good reasons why a family chooses not to pursue child support.

If this committee is interested in ways to use the SNAP program to promote work, we suggest they look to the proposal that we and other members of Advocates for Ohio's Future have been promoting to improve the quality and reach of the SNAP Employment and Training program rather than enacting a blanket prohibition on ABAWD time-limit waivers and other restrictive policies that will cause immediate harm in struggling communities like Lordstown throughout the state.

Thank you for your time and I am available to answer any questions members of the committee may have.

⁴ <https://www.governing.com/gov-institute/voices/col-forcing-food-stamp-recipients-receive-child-support-services.html>

⁵ <https://childandfamilyresearch.utexas.edu/child-support-unpacked-examining-factors-associated-order-establishment-and-compliance-texas-child>