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House Bill 200  
House Health Committee

Testimony in Opposition to HB 200

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

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services is a civil legal services program serving low-income individuals throughout the rural Appalachian area of the state. Our mission includes helping people rise out of poverty.

HB 200 as currently written would have a severe negative impact on Southeastern Ohio low-income families and individuals struggling to overcome addiction.

Residents in Southeastern Ohio live in rural counties that are historically economically disadvantaged. The rate of unemployment in this region of Ohio is almost always the highest. In addition to the lack of available work, transportation systems are simply not in place to assist low-income workers to get back and forth to the jobs that might be available. Imposing work requirements when work is not available will result in families losing SNAP benefits at a time when it is most needed.

**Eliminating time-limit waiver will have a particularly severe impact on recovering addicts.**

There has been a lot of effort in addressing the opioid/substance abuse crisis in Ohio. Southeastern Ohio, already economically disadvantaged, has been identified as being particularly affected by this crisis. As a participant in various local Opioid Hub activities, I and others in our program have spent a lot of time working within our communities promoting treatment and recovery as well as prevention and education.

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Early on in our hub work, it was recognized that employment was an important goal to any effort. In exploring efforts to expand workforce opportunities for recovering addicts in Washington County, for instance, there appeared to be a lack of understanding of the process involved in recovery. Joint meetings were held with work force individuals and treatment providers. It became clear that those going through recovery were often not ready to seek employment or engage in employment or training activities for months or even a year or more.

Staying sober for many is an effort often involving every waking minute. Like a job, recovery requires 100% participation. Many individuals coming out of recovery participate in intensive outpatient recovery programs with multiple daily interactions. Even doing the most mundane tasks of brushing one's teeth or doing laundry have to be relearned and reinforced. On top of all of these barriers, even qualifying for an exemption would be difficult. Imagine how a person who has difficulty remembering to brush his/her teeth would understand how to obtain an exemption and be able to navigate the bureaucratic and administrative process to apply for such an exemption.

The proposed work requirements would interfere with treatment and recovery efforts and place unnecessary burdens on individuals who are already emotionally fragile, struggling to stay sober and without access to jobs. Denying them access to SNAP benefits would be devastating and interfere if not end their participation in treatment programs.

**Requiring cooperation with paternity, establishing, modifying and enforcing child support orders would also have a severe impact on vulnerable families.**

There are many reasons that families do not pursue child support. Requiring cooperation in order to obtain essential benefits like SNAP would place domestic violence survivors in potential danger. Domestic violence survivors often fear that pursuing child support puts them and their children at risk of additional abuse. Imposing this requirement would force families to choose between safety and eating.

There are a number of grandparents and other family members are providing kinship care to children without the benefit of child support. These arrangements are often temporary and done with the consent of the parent who is struggling with addiction and other issues. If seeking child support was a condition of receiving SNAP benefits, many parents would not allow their children to be cared for by other family members and children's well-being would be jeopardized.

As outlined above, many individuals in recovery are simply unable to work, seek work or otherwise comply with child support obligations while in recovery. This becomes very problematic when delinquent child support arrears become a disqualifying factor. Many recovering addicts with minor children have child support orders that they are unable to fulfill and have accumulated arrearages. While in recovery, not only are they unable to

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work but they are unable to pay child support. Even those recovering addicts who might be in a position to apply for and receive a medical exemption will be unable to escape the effects of disqualification for failure to pay child support or pay child support arrears.

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