

TESTIMONY

ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

HB 64

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
WORKFORCE SUBCOMMITTEE

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Good morning, Chairman Beagle, Ranking member Yuko, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Col Owens. I am a Senior Attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, and serve as Co-Chair of Advocates for Ohio's Future, a statewide coalition that advocates for budget and policy changes to improve the lives of all Ohioans. AOF has almost 500 supporting organizations throughout Ohio.

We agree with Governor Kasich and state lawmakers, that jobs are fundamental for a strong economy, stable families, and individual well-being. Communities thrive when people work.

For many workers a job does not mean a living. We are living in an era of wage stagnation. The median income has declined 13% over the last decade. Yet costs to support a family have continued to rise. While unemployment has fallen, there is a trend toward low-wage, part-time and temporary jobs.

Human services play a key role in stabilizing individuals and families. To enable all Ohioans to have the opportunity to participate in our changing economy, we must ensure they have the education, health care, other appropriate necessary services, and skills to enter and remain in the workforce. We need bold public investments and policy changes to strengthen our workforce and make Ohioans competitive.

AOF supports four lead policy areas ripe for reform and investment.

1. Many Ohioans need **person-centered work preparation** to get and keep jobs, to support themselves and their families. To accomplish this, public investment and policy changes are needed. AOF supports an intensive case management work program, as proposed by the Governor and supported by the House. We will work with the Department of Job and Family Services and the Healthier Buckeye Council to design and operate a successful program. We would stress that there are shortages of administrative funds for successful operation of all relevant programs – Medicaid, Food Assistance, TANF, Child Care – that must be addressed.
2. Ohio must invest in **programs that support working families**. As noted above, a job does not necessarily mean a living. Between poverty and self-sufficiency is an income range where low-wage employees and their families receive support and stabilization from public programs. Ohio should promote stability as well as upward mobility toward self-sufficiency by increasing entry-level eligibility for child care assistance, and by making the state earned income tax credit refundable.
3. We should strengthen **Ohio's direct service workforce** – people providing care for individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living. This workforce is expected to grow more than any other employment sector in the next five years. We are concerned about shortages of these workers, as our state's population of older adults and people with disabilities grows. Shortages lead to inefficiencies and poor health outcomes, and can force individuals to move from home to more costly institutional care. The budget should improve wages and conditions for these workers.

4. While good jobs and a strong economy are keys to a greater quality of life for all Ohioans, it is vitally important to **ensure the safety of older Ohioans** (and younger Ohioans, see below). We support the recommendations of the Adult Protective Services (APS) Funding Workgroup. But we believe that more resources are needed, to ensure that older adults in all counties are safe, from abuse, neglect and exploitation. An additional \$20 million is needed to achieve that goal.

In addition to these four lead areas, AOF partners with other lead groups in several related areas, including children's services, food assistance, behavioral health, housing and Medicaid.

1. We believe strongly, with PCSAO, that an additional \$20 million is needed to protect our children in all counties.
2. We believe, with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, that an additional \$2.75 million is needed to provide sufficient assistance to hungry Ohioans.
3. We support, with the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers, maintaining the status quo regarding behavioral health, so that more planning can be done for improving service capacity prior to the carve-in.
4. With COHHIO, we support the current approach to the Housing Trust Fund.
5. Regarding Medicaid, we support restoration of eligibility to 200% FPL for pregnant women, the Breast and Cervical Cancer program, and Family Planning, to support our efforts to reduce infant mortality. We also oppose the Health Savings Account waiver proposed in the House budget as unrealistic for low-income persons.

AFO is committed to ensuring that all Ohioans are safe, healthy and productive. We believe that with these improvements, the budget will strengthen our workforce and economy, keep vulnerable older and younger Ohioans safe, and provide opportunity for all.

It's time to re-invest in Ohio and Ohioans.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I will be happy to answer any questions.