



1108 City Park Avenue, Suite 200  
Columbus, OH 43206  
614.827.0549  
[www.ohiopoverlylawcenter.org](http://www.ohiopoverlylawcenter.org)

**Ohio Poverty Law Center  
Graham Bowman, Staff Attorney  
Substitute House Bill 166  
Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid  
May 15, 2019**

Chair Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, 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 investments and policy changes that will improve the lives of low-income Ohioans.

Many investments in HB166 that support Ohioans living in poverty and struggling to support their families. In particular, we appreciate the significant resources for the public children services agencies and wrap around mental health services in schools, and proposals to prevent and combat lead poisoning. We ask you to maintain these important investments.

We are also encouraged by the provision in Amended 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 many positive investments in the budget before you, we would like to highlight some areas where you can do more 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 the Senate to 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**

Ohio's able-bodied adult Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) 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 by drawing down federal dollars to match existing investments being made by community colleges, community-based nonprofits, and other workforce development agencies, as well as for support services that make their work possible.

We are pleased to see Jobs and Family Services Director Hall highlight in her testimony the agency's commitment to advancing workforce development initiatives in Ohio, such as SNAP Employment and Training. We fully support the Agency's ask that current funding levels be maintained so that the department can continue to explore ways to enhance the SNAP Employment and Training program and hopefully draw down federal matching dollars to support the great work being done by community-based nonprofit workforce development agencies.

While as a state we continue to pursue innovative approaches to expanding access to workforce supports and training, it is important to remember that there are federal dollars being left on the table through the SNAP Employment and Training program that could support existing community-based nonprofit agencies and supportive services providers.

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

The core of the TANF programs: are (1) 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).

Enrollment in OWF has decreased and PRC benefits have become increasingly difficult for enrollees to access over the past 20 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 the current reserve dollars in improving the quality of childcare programs, 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** an amendment requiring that in the event of an underspend, at least 50 percent of any remaining moneys at the end of each fiscal year be used to increase the cash assistance provided to recipients of benefits under the TANF Ohio Works First program in the following fiscal year. The majority of OWF recipients are child-only cases. Using 50 percent of potentially unspent TANF dollars for an increase to the OWF benefit will help ensure TANF dollars go to maintaining the integrity of core TANF programming.