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**Angela Lloyd, Executive Director of
the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation
Proponent Testimony, House Bill 166**

Good Morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Angela Lloyd, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of HB 166.

Twenty-five years ago, the Ohio General Assembly had the foresight to order that the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation be created. You charged the Foundation with improving access to justice and ensuring that Ohio's legal aid societies and other resources, programs and services exist to address the unmet civil legal needs of low-income and underserved Ohioans. To support this mission, the Foundation relies on the financial resources generated by a civil filing fee surcharge and by the interest earned on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA).

Over the last quarter century, the Foundation has worked diligently to ensure that Ohioans struggling to make ends meet can overcome legal problems which can prevent them from living safe, stable, and productive lives. Through the Foundation's support, Ohio's legal aids help survivors of domestic violence; seniors experiencing financial exploitation; children striving to succeed in school; and veterans transitioning to civilian life. Thank you for recognizing the value of this work to all Ohioans.

During the FY16-17 biennium, the General Assembly made its first-ever GRF investment in legal aid with \$1.5 million in GRF funding to provide more legal services to our veterans. For that funding, we are extremely grateful. That funding helped to serve veterans like Martin.*

Martin,* a 63-year-old Vietnam veteran, served in the U.S. Marines from 1973 to 1978. He suffers from multiple mental health issues and struggles to remain stable and housed. When his mobile home park served him with an eviction notice for non-payment of rent, Martin went to legal aid for help. Working with his legal aid lawyer, Martin was able to prove that he had paid the rent for the month in question. Martin's legal aid lawyer discovered that Martin did owe a nominal fee for a shed covered under a different lease and that the money owed on the shed had created the confusion resulting in Martin's threatened eviction. Thanks to legal aid, the eviction was dismissed and Martin remains stably housed in his mobile home and even paid to retain use of the shed.

During the difficult FY18-19 budget deliberations, when you faced a significant state funding shortfall, GRF funding for legal aid was reduced dramatically. As a result, we weren't able to serve as many veterans. Thus I am here before you, today, to ask that you to include \$250,000 in each year of the FY20-21





Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, Inc.
FUNDING LAWYERS WHO CHANGE LIVES

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biennium, so that legal aid can serve more Ohio veterans and help them access the benefits they earned through their service to our nation; preserve their housing; and address other legal challenges that they face, so that they can live safe and stable lives.

I am pleased to report that Governor DeWine recognized legal aid's work in combatting the opioid crisis and included \$250,000 in each year of the FY20-21 budget for the sole purpose of providing legal services for economically disadvantaged individuals and families seeking assistance with legal issues arising as a result of substance abuse disorders. For this, the Foundation is extremely grateful. With this funding, legal aids across Ohio will be able to do more to ensure that the children of addicted parents are placed in the custody of family members; that Ohioans who need treatment can access it; and that individuals who have recovered from addiction can get back to work. The Governor's additional funding will help to expand and support legal aid's work in this critical area, and I ask that you support this appropriation.

Finally, I ask for your support of an amendment added by the House that will change our name to the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation. We have always served as Ohio's access to justice organization, although our current name does not make that clear. We are currently engaged in an array of projects to improve access to the courts and the legal system for all Ohioans. Thus, we need a name that both better reflects our mission and work as well as announces to Ohio and the national community that we are engaged in the work of improving access to justice. In addition, changing our name will allow us to better access national funding to support our work. Changing our name to the Access to Justice Foundation will help us both in being recognized nationally as a leader in this space and in opening opportunities to bring national funding into the state.

Let me close by saying, "Thank you," again. Thank you for creating us twenty-five years ago; thank you for being partners in our work; thank you for supporting our name change and thank you for supporting a \$1 million GRF appropriation in the biennium, \$500,000, per the Governor, to serve families struggling with opioid addiction and \$500,000 to provide more service to Ohio's veterans. Thank you, finally, for your time and consideration of our requests. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

*Name changed to protect client privacy.



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