



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Am. Sub. HB 166, Main Operating Budget FY2020-FY2021
Interested Party Testimony
Senate Finance - May 28, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld, and I am the Coalition Manager of Advocates for Ohio's Future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Amended Substitute House Bill 166.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a nonpartisan coalition of nearly 500 organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so that all Ohioans live better lives. Our coalition believes in investing in our state's most valuable resource—our people—to ensure that they are safe, healthy, and can access pathways to prosperity for themselves and their families.

The budget introduced by Governor DeWine and improved upon by the House includes significant and important investments in systems needed to support Ohioans living in poverty or dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues. We applaud their recognition that investing in Ohio builds a better future.

We are glad that the Governor and the House have fully funded the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Medicaid Expansion, which provide health care to hundreds of thousands of low wage workers and their children. The tens of thousands of jobs supported by the federal dollars those programs bring into Ohio strengthen the health care system and the economy in every community of Ohio.

The resources included in Sub HB 166 effectively respond to the addiction and mental illness public health crisis facing our state. We are also encouraged to see that the House added support to the governor's investment in stemming the infant mortality crisis. Thank you for that important investment.

We are heartened by the House budget's instructions for the Medicaid Director to establish a Medicaid waiver component that addresses social determinants of health, including housing, transportation, food, interpersonal safety, and toxic stress. We know the conditions in which we live and access to social and economic opportunities play a major role in a person's overall physical and mental health. Ohio ranks [46th among the states in health value](#), which means that Ohioans are less healthy and spend more on health care than people in most other states. This is largely because of many missed upstream opportunities to prevent or better manage injury, illness and disability for thousands of Ohioans.

While we acknowledge and appreciate many investments and initiatives within the budget, more can be done to truly improve the lives of children and families in this state. In order to make meaningful investments in our future, we urge inclusion of the following proposals that will invest in our children, strengthen Ohio's families and communities, and increase opportunity for Ohioans.

Increased funding for Adult Protective Services

We are pleased to see additional investments made for adult protective services (APS). Now, more than ever, older Ohioans face the prospect of elder abuse in the form of financial exploitation from scam artists, friends or family and the grim prospect of suffering physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

For this and many other reasons, **we ask that funding for APS be increased in the ODJFS budget from \$4.23 million each year of the biennium to \$5.72 million each year of the biennium.** At current budget levels, each county receives around \$30,000 for APS. Sub HB 166 provides for around \$48,000 per county. Our proposed increase would provide \$65,000 per county in Ohio, enough to fund one full time APS caseworker.

Eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care

We thank Governor DeWine and the House for continuing to move forward with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as that agency achieves [quality](#) and boosts investment in the structure of Ohio’s publicly funded childcare program.

However we are disappointed that the budget does not include new GRF funding to expand access to child care by **increasing the level of initial eligibility to the Governor’s promise of 150 percent of poverty; the goal of AOF is to see initial eligibility for public child care assistance restored to [200 percent of poverty](#)** and fully aligned with the public preschool program, allowing thousands of children and families to take advantage of enrichment programs for early learners while supporting low-income working parents.

The important investments we see in this budget - and the investments necessary to improve the system - should be supported by predictable and sustainable state-based funding now, and in the future.

Ohio Works First

Ohio Works First is the financial assistance portion of the state’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, which provides cash benefits to needy families for up to 36 months.

To be eligible for OWF cash assistance, applicants must have a minor child or pregnant woman (at least six months pregnant) in the assistance group. Families must also have incomes of no more than 50% of the FPL (about \$10,000 annually for a family of three in 2019).

The majority of those receiving OWF in Ohio today are child-only cases (nearly 90 percent), minor children that are being cared for and who are living with guardians and relatives, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and even older siblings.

OWF benefits by assistance group size in 2018

Assistance Group Size	OWF Payment
1	\$ 289.00
2	\$ 395.00
3	\$ 483.00
4	\$ 596.00

Declining caseloads in Ohio, and nationally, mean that fewer and fewer families can purchase essentials, tooth paste, shampoo, laundry soap, diapers or feminine hygiene products, because they no longer have access to cash support offered by OWF.

For these reasons, we are asking that **at least 50 percent of TANF block grant and TANF State Maintenance of Effort moneys that remain at the end of each fiscal year be used to increase the cash assistance provided to recipients of benefits under the OWF program in the following fiscal year.**

In the past, the underspend has ranged from \$90-\$120 million in each year. If current spending trends in TANF funds holds true, the increase would be less than \$100 per assistance group each month. This proposal will not increase the TANF appropriation, but simply allows the money to be used for the primary purpose of the TANF program—to support poor families.

Food Assistance

Hunger affects the lives of more than 1 in 7 Ohioans - including 1 in 5 children who don't always have access to the food they need to meet their basic needs. Hunger does irreparable harm to people, communities and our state's economy. Half of all food insecure Ohioans live in households that earn too much to qualify for help from SNAP. For those 829,000 people, food pantries and soup kitchens are the only safety net they have.

AOF supports the Ohio Association of Foodbanks request to provide an additional \$10 million per year in the bill. This funding will allow them to purchase over 50 million pounds of healthy wholesome food we need to feed our hungry friends and neighbors. This request represents just \$1.25 per person, per month, who is served by the statewide network.

SNAP E&T 50/50 Reimbursement "SNAP to Skills"

Most able-bodied adults receiving SNAP (food stamp) benefits are subject to an Employment and Training (E&T) requirement. SNAP recipients may fulfill their E&T requirement by participating in either: (1) a work experience program (WEP), (2) employment and training activities, which may include either basic education or vocational training, or (3) job search/readiness programming.

Through our partners at legal aid and county JFS offices, we know the availability and quality of these programs varies greatly across the states.

There's currently an opportunity for the state and any provider of E&T programming to receive a 50 percent reimbursement from the federal government of non-federal dollars. This is called the SNAP E&T 50/50 program. The money is uncapped, and any drawn-down funds can be reinvested and submitted again for reimbursement. In Ohio, existing non-profits, workforce development agencies, community colleges and other entities providing these services and could benefit from the 50 percent reimbursement.

Unfortunately, these entities are not taking advantage of this opportunity because Ohio has not fully incorporated SNAP E&T 50/50 into the state or county plans and does not have the infrastructure established to administer these federal funds.

As a result, many SNAP recipients across the state have faced a shortage of meaningful, quality training programs and other essential supports needed to secure and retain a living-wage job. Given a pending federal rule that will subject many more Ohioans to work requirements, we want to ensure that adequate capacity and quality job training and support services exist for all Ohioans whether they live in Cuyahoga, Summit or Crawford Counties.

In order to fully take advantage of available federal dollars to expand access and capacity for quality E&T programs, we urge you to **invest \$4 million in GRF each fiscal year to spur development of SNAP 50-50 eligible training initiatives and provide support to the state and county JFS agencies to build and coordinate the administrative infrastructure needed to manage the program.**

Though we are pleased with new initiatives and investments in job training within several agencies in Sub HB 166, many focus on young workers or high school students. We believe this investment will give older or struggling workers a second chance to develop the skills they need in the new economy.

Maternal Mortality

Our partners at the [Center for Community Solutions](#) have worked for the past year to bring attention to the lack of timely reporting and information on pregnancy-associated deaths in Ohio. The most recent data (from 2014) available for Ohio shows that between 2008 and 2014 there were 408 pregnancy-associated deaths.

We are thankful for the language in the House-passed bill that codifies Ohio's Pregnancy Associated Mortality Review (PAMR) committee and moves toward strengthening data and reporting on this issue by requiring data reports every three years.

To further strengthen this committee and its review of all maternal deaths in the state, we recommend **annual reporting requirements, more timely requests and submission of information related to each death to the Ohio Department of Health, recognizing and collecting data on severe maternal morbidity (“near misses”), and ensuring diverse representation of maternal health experts on the PAMR committee.**

State Earned Income Tax Credit

AOF lauds lawmakers’ recent improvements to the EITC. The EITC rewards work and makes a real difference for low income families. However, [refundability](#) is the most powerful aspect of the EITC. Reforms made to the EITC in the transportation budget will be helpful to some families of modest income, but will not help the 20 percent of Ohio families with the lowest incomes, who need assistance the most.

We encourage the General Assembly to make Ohio’s EITC refundable, which is the only approach they can take to income tax policy that will help the poorest Ohio families.

State infrastructure for the 2020 U.S. Census

Ohio is less than a year away from the [2020 Census](#) count. Though the administration has taken several steps toward enacting a plan for census efforts, Ohio is significantly behind in developing state and local Complete Count Commissions and coordinating efforts to ensure every person in every corner of our state is appropriately counted. An inaccurate count could mean the loss of one or two Congressional representatives, and losses to the more than \$33.5 billion of federal funding distributed to Ohio based on the Census for important programs like highway planning and construction, Medicaid, housing, SNAP, foster care, business loans, and more.

The House budget does not allocate funds dedicated to educational and accuracy efforts in hard to reach communities and proposed federal resources for the Census are estimated to be \$2 billion less than recommended. In 2010, Ohio committed no state funds to census efforts and missed close to 70,000 individuals, resulting in the loss of a Congressional seat.

We ask this committee commit \$1.1 million in GRF to the Development Services Agency for grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations doing outreach and communications in hard-to-count neighborhoods to ensure each Ohioan is counted for the equitable and accurate distribution of public funds and the preservation of Ohio’s representation in Congress.

Public Transit

The General Assembly appropriated \$70 million GRF dollars in the Transportation Budget for public transit. Between that appropriation and the \$6.5 million in the operating budget, state funding is almost level with what it was in 2016-17 biennium, before the state narrowed the sales tax by taking the Medicaid Managed Care Organization tax out of the state base, upon which transit agencies can levy a sales tax. We are glad to see transit is almost made whole in Sub HB 166, but much more needs to be done. According to the 2015 [Statewide Transit Needs study](#), the state should have started investing \$125 million a year in 2015, rising to \$185 million by 2025, to meet public transit needs in Ohio - far more than what is appropriated in the transportation budget and the operating budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Sub HB 166. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Advocates for Ohio’s Future

175 S. 3rd Street, Suite 350 | Columbus, OH 43215 | 614.745.0740 ext. 305 | kbergfeld@communitysolutions.com