



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Am. Sub. HB 166, Main Operating Budget FY2020-FY2021
Interested Party Testimony
Senate Finance - June 14, 2019
(Written Only)

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 Senate sub-bill includes significant and important investments in systems needed to support Ohioans living in poverty or dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues. Thank you for your recognition that investing in Ohio builds a better future.

We are glad that the Senate continues to fully fund 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. We are thankful that harmful, administratively complex and expensive barriers to Medicaid coverage like those included in the Healthy Ohio proposal remain out of the bill.

We are heartened by the House budget's instructions for the Medicaid Director to implement strategies 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.

We are also thankful for the inclusion of additional dollars for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, to support them in helping feed the 1 in 7 Ohioans, and 1 in 5 children who are food insecure across our state.

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.

State Support 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 Senate sub-bill 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. According to the Urban Institute, [Ohio is at risk of missing close to 74,000 individuals in 2020](#).

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.

Ohio Works First

The Senate sub-bill requires the ODJFS Director to seek federal approval to operate a two-year demonstration project under which an Ohio Works First (OWF) participant satisfies federal work requirements through on-the-job training, education directly related to employment, or a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence.

Currently, most adults and minor heads of household must participate in work activities which include on-the-job training, community service and education directly related to employment. They must also sign a self-sufficiency contract in order to receive benefits. Failure to sign or comply with the terms of the contract will result in termination of benefits for the household. If a beneficiary quits a job without just cause, they are ineligible for benefits for six months.

As of [March 2019](#), 90.5% (82,064) of the OWF caseload were children. Of 8,645 adults receiving OWF benefits, 6,293 (72.8%) were subject to the work requirement.

AOF would welcome additional investments in supports and quality education training opportunities for adults subject to work requirement on their path to self-sufficiency in both the OWF program, SNAP food assistance program and soon to be Medicaid program.

The Senate sub-bill fails to take advantage of available federal dollars to expand access and capacity for quality education and training (E&T) programs through the SNAP E&T 50/50 or SNAP to Skills program through the United States Department of Agriculture. Through this program the state and any provider of E&T programming can receive a 50 percent reimbursement from the federal government of non-federal dollars. The money is uncapped, and any drawn-down funds can be reinvested and submitted again for reimbursement.

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. In order to ensure that adequate capacity and quality job training and support services exist for all Ohioans subject to work requirements across the state, **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.**

Mental Health and Addiction

AOF supports investments to teach students social and emotional skills needed to make healthy decisions throughout their lives. AOF applauds the work in supporting schools with wraparound services but prevention education must remain a dedicated initiative. Unfortunately, the Senate removed funding for two important investments in mental health and addiction: K-12 prevention education and reducing stigma through a campaign that were both identified as priority initiatives by RecoveryOhio.

Stigma facing mental health and addiction are deep seeded and have created barriers to addressing these issues for years. It has become entrenched in how society understands and identifies behavioral health, how systems of care were built, how the criminal justice system has become the largest treatment provider, and how we address public policy and funding initiatives. It must be undone to get to the root cause. If Ohio is going to move forward with investments and sound public policy, we must address stigma. **We ask that you restore funding dedicated to K-12 prevention efforts and public media campaigns to increase awareness and reduce stigma.**

Temporary Child Hosting

The Senate sub-bill contains provisions of Senate Bill 6, allowing temporary child hosting for less than one year under certain circumstances, for families facing short-term crises that do not involve child abuse or neglect. Senate Bill 6 has passed the Senate and is currently under consideration in House Health Committee.

AOF and our members recognize the need that Senate Bill 6 intends to meet and appreciate current programs and organizations assisting families facing short-term crises. As host family programs grow, it will be important that they maintain their sole focus on families facing short-term crises other than child abuse or neglect, and not unintentionally evolve into an alternate, unregulated foster care system.

We understand that a number of our members, ODJFS and other stakeholders have been in touch with the cosponsors, expressing a desire to make some changes in the bill as it moves through the House. Because the bill moved so quickly through the Senate, **we ask that you remove the provisions of Senate Bill 6 from the budget bill and allow state agencies, stakeholders and lawmakers to continue the committee process.**

Ohio Housing Trust Fund

Homelessness and housing insecurity are increasingly common issues for Ohio families and children. The rising cost of living and lack of affordable housing has left too many families in need of a safe place to stay.

Housing is by far the most expensive item in the family budget and is simply out of reach for many Ohioans. Nearly one in three Ohio households are “housing cost burdened”, overcrowded, or living in functionally substandard housing.

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund helps make home a reality for hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who need it most by supporting services for the homeless, affordable housing development, home repair, and accessibility modifications. At the same time, the Trust Fund boosts the economy and helps revitalize local communities.

We ask that you support the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio’s (COHHIO) ask for a modest increase in the county recorder fees to invest an additional \$8 million for more safe, affordable housing in Ohio.

Evidence-based Home Visiting

Evidence-based home visiting leads to improved birth outcomes, improved academic performance and kindergarten readiness for children reduced parental stress, and increased parental understanding of their child’s development. **Funding for Help Me Grow was decreased by \$20 million over the biennium in the Senate sub-**

bill. This critical strategy to improve infant mortality rates and improve educational outcomes needs to be restored.

Eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care

We thank the Senate for continuing to move forward with ODJFS as that agency boosts quality in Ohio's publicly funded childcare program. We were encouraged to see additional GRF dollars added to help providers achieve the goals set forth in Step Up to Quality.

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.

Refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

A 10% refundable EITC would do more for the poorest Ohioans than the rate and bracket cuts in the Senate tax plan. Low-income Ohioans pay a much larger share of their income in state and local taxes than the richest Ohioans do, and personal exemptions along with the EITC wipe out all or most tax liability for many of the poorest taxpayers.

The EITC goes only to working families. As helpful as the state EITC is, improved by the General Assembly in the transportation budget, it does not do enough to help the poorest Ohioans because it is not refundable. A cash-back refund pays for child care, buys food and makes home and car repairs and boosts the economy overall.

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.