

88th House District
Seneca and Sandusky County



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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to bring before you a long overdue commons-sense piece of legislation. HB 410, otherwise known as A HAND UP or Actionable Help And New Dignity for Upward Progression, addresses a sustained need in communities all across Ohio. It affects both urban and rural districts and knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries. My joint sponsor Representative Dontavius Jarrells and I have welcomed input from various interested parties including but not limited to the Chamber of Commerce and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services.

One of the great tragedies in our current economic climate is that we have people who want to work and employers who want to hire but a barrier in-between. That barrier is commonly known as the benefits cliff. I've discovered that when you use that name, not everyone knows what you are talking about but when you describe it EVERYONE does.

There is often a stigma attached to those who receive assistance that implies that they don't want to work or better themselves. While we cannot say that that is never true, we can say that it's not always true. I grew up in the poverty of a single home with a mother raising three kids. It was not unusual for Mom to send me to the store to grab a gallon of milk with a book of food stamps. It was something that I was ashamed of at the time due to the stigma and not something that she was proud of either. Today, I look back and I'm grateful that it met a need. However, the problem was that my mother was not content being dependent. She wanted the dignity of work. However, she felt trapped.

Taking a job meant actually going backwards financially and the loss of important benefits like healthcare. As a child, I couldn't understand why my mother who wanted to work was hindered by a system that wouldn't let her work. After entering into the ministry and

working with many of the working poor, I began to hear this story over and over again. During my first meeting with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce I learned that this was an issue on their radar. After meeting with many local employers, I learned that this is an all too common problem for them.

Not only do we have people who find it difficult to take a job, we also have working poor who are forced to limit the number of hours they work and required to refuse raises and promotions. Earning just ten dollars too much will disqualify them from certain benefits. By showing initiative, working longer and harder, and meeting their employer's needs, they suffer loss. In so doing, we are penalizing productivity. This is the benefits cliff. As a result, many never take that next step, which will lead to another and another until they can reach that point of complete independence while simultaneously meeting the needs of the workforce.

My mother took that leap off the cliff but it wasn't easy. Today, she is retired from a very successful career and she is my hero. She taught me to work hard and never give up. Not everyone can do that like she did. That is why it is incumbent upon us to transform the benefits cliff into a bridge of opportunity. This cliff is complicated by the fact that there are so many entities involved including both the state and the federal government. Fortunately, we were able to enlist the help of an expert in this field. Joel Potts is the director of the Department of Jobs and Family Services Directors Association and is passionate about this topic. With the permission of Chair Manchester, I will ask him to provide some of the technical aspects of our sub bill and then we would all be happy to take your questions.

Sincerely,



State Representative Gary Click
Ohio House District 88

