



Shared Prosperity, Thriving Ohioans

Testimony on HB 110 before the Senate Finance Committee

Will Petrik

Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, my name is Will Petrik. I am the budget researcher with Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Our mission is to create a more prosperous, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 110.

All children in Ohio, no matter where they live or what they look like, should have enough to eat. We must work together to ensure that even in the aftermath of a pandemic, all families have a strong foundation of stability and economic security.

To ensure all Ohioans fully recover from the pandemic, policymakers must prioritize amendments to the bill that will:

- Make sure all Ohioans can support their families and participate in the economy.
- Help Ohioans through the deepest crisis since the Great Depression.
- Prevent homelessness and stabilize families experiencing deep poverty.

The pandemic has upended life in Ohio. Hundreds of thousands of Ohioans are working hard to put food on the table, pay the rent and afford the basics, but still aren't paid enough to make ends meet. The pandemic has hit Black Ohioans the hardest due to years policy choices that excluded Black Ohioans from building wealth and financial security and from education and housing opportunities. For too long, certain Ohio lawmakers have chosen to shift public resources away from Black and brown communities, from poor and working-class Ohioans, and toward the wealthy and well-connected.¹

Policy Matters Ohio has several suggestions for how lawmakers can stabilize families, build a strong recovery and expand opportunity to more Ohioans.

Expand opportunity: Help more parents participate in the workforce

State lawmakers must ensure all Ohioans can support their families and participate in the economy. The proposed budget takes a small step in making child care more affordable and accessible by increasing initial eligibility for publicly funded child care from 130% to 138% of the federal poverty level.² Lawmakers can take a larger step by making child care affordable for all who need it. Right now, a single mother of two earning \$15/hour spends over half her income on child care, but makes too much to qualify for public support. **State lawmakers can make child care affordable for her by expanding initial eligibility for publicly funded child care from 130% to 200% of the federal poverty level.** This would help more mothers participate in the workforce, and better prepare our children for the future.

¹ Patton, Wendy, "Ohio's tax structure and racial disparities," Policy Matters Ohio, February 11, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3c6RMGw>.

² "Investing in Ohio's Future: Thriving Economy," Ohio Office of Budget and Management, Executive Budget Factsheets, accessed on March 1, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3sUQINh>.

Ohioans must be able to receive vital medical services during the public health emergency and lingering recession. We ask you to maintain Medicaid services without imposing new barriers or additional hoops to access health care. Extra barriers, like premiums, and new hoops, such as additional paperwork and reporting requirements, make it more difficult for Ohioans to get health care coverage and burdens county health and human service agencies with additional administrative costs. When families and communities have child care and health care, we all benefit from a stronger economy and a more prosperous state.

Ensure all Ohioans can support their families

All children need a safe, stable environment that supports their growth and development. Yet poverty, structural racism, and the ongoing opiate addiction crisis have resulted in many Ohio children enduring the trauma of separation from their family of origin. Children in the child welfare system who are placed with relatives (called kinship caregivers) receive far less financial support from the state of Ohio than children placed in a licensed foster care setting.

We remain concerned that the new Kinship Support Program does not address the needs of children and kinship families. The new program was designed without input from kinship caregivers and, like the current system, is unfair and inequitable for children and kinship families.³ Children placed with approved relative caregivers (kinship caregivers) have a right to the same level of state financial support as children placed with foster parents. **State lawmakers should adhere to federal law and allocate additional resources to provide these children and their kinship caregivers the security and stability they deserve.**

We are pleased the House budget partially restored the kinship caregiver program to \$10 million per year. We encourage the Senate to fully restore this program to \$15 million per year to help kinship caregivers with short-term expenses.

As lawmakers, we also ask you to address our state's shamefully high rates of Black infant and maternal mortality. We encourage you to embrace the American Rescue Plan's federal matching funds for a full year of coverage after childbirth for women insured by Medicaid. We also request that you allow the certification of doulas, whose services are instrumental in reducing infant and maternal mortality.

Help Ohioans through the deepest crisis since the Great Depression

Research shows that living in deep poverty compromises children's ability to grow and negatively impacts their income and health as adults.⁴ Funding the health and well-being of kids now creates savings in the future. Cash assistance (Ohio Works First: OWF), emergency food, homeless prevention services, and one-time emergency assistance (Prevention, Retention, and Contingency: PRC) all support health and safety of children and families with very low incomes. OWF and PRC provide direct cash assistance to help with food, safe housing, health care and other basic necessities. Food banks provide emergency relief by helping Ohioans in need with food, personal care items and household cleaning supplies. Unemployment compensation helps Ohioans make it through periods of financial insecurity.

More than a year after the pandemic struck, far too many claimants for unemployment compensation (UC) are still enduring lengthy waits to receive benefits they are due. State lawmakers must ensure that the Ohio Department of Job and Families Services has the staffing capacity to process UC claims promptly.

³ Petrik, Will, "Ohio is still short-changing kids and caregivers," Policy Matters Ohio, January 21, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3a6Sfbz>.

⁴ "A roadmap to reducing child poverty," Consensus study report highlights, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, February 2019, <https://bit.ly/3aFTowj>.

Prevent homelessness and stabilize families experiencing deep poverty

Lawmakers can prevent homelessness and help stabilize Ohioans who are experiencing an emergency now by **increasing the basic OWF cash grant by a minimum of \$100 a month**. This change would mean an average payment of \$314 a month per recipient.⁵ The current average payment of \$214 is not enough to pay for basic necessities for a family. The increase will help more families get by as we recover from the recession and pay for basics that support the health and safety of children. Lawmakers should also **allocate \$50 million for one-time emergency assistance** through the TANF program. The TANF local Prevention, Retention, and Contingency Programs could provide one-time payments of \$500 to 100,000 families with immediate, emergency needs and move money directly into Ohio's economy when families spend it on car repairs, at the grocery store or on school supplies.

No Ohioan should have to worry about where their next meal will come from or whether they have a roof over their head. Lawmakers can reduce the threat of homelessness and stave off all the potential harm such periods of instability cause children by **allocating \$25 million annually within TANF for the "Housing Now for Homeless Families"** program. This program quickly rehuses homeless children and families. By setting aside **at least \$45 million per year for Ohio's food banks to deliver hunger and poverty relief to over 2 million Ohioans**, lawmakers will make sure food isn't a barrier to success at school, at work, or for those providing care services at home. This funding will help build capacity for local front-line hunger relief organizations that have lost volunteer services due to the pandemic. It will give food banks the means to make emergency purchases for families in need, including food, personal care items and household cleaning supplies.

Ensure all Ohioans have security and stability

We have heard that some lawmakers are considering including Senate Bill 17 in the budget. This legislation would hurt Ohio's recovery from the recession and make children, adults, and families less stable and secure. The proposed legislation would make it harder for our neighbors to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps keep families fed during difficult times. We need a strong recovery for all Ohioans, and SB 17 would move Ohio in the opposite direction.

More Ohioans are living with hunger and insecurity due to the pandemic and the recession. Instead of more tax giveaways to the wealthiest Ohioans, state lawmakers need to ensure that the wealthiest Ohioans contribute to make sure all Ohioans can recover and thrive. We request that the Ohio Senate direct more resources to families with low-wages by making the state EITC refundable.

Thank you for your commitment to building an Ohio where we all can share in the prosperity our work helps create. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly if you have questions or concerns about the content of my testimony.

⁵ In January 2021, the average Ohio Works First payment per recipient was \$214, "Ohio Works First," Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, accessed on April 30, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3ueacl1>.