



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Written Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Amended Substitute HB 110, Main Operating Budget FY2022-FY2023
June 3, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld. I am the Director of Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF). AOF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of over 500 state and local health and human services policy, advocacy and provider organizations that strive to strengthen families and communities through public funding for health, human services, and early care & education. We work to empower and support nonprofit organizations in the critical work they do, especially as it relates to lifting up the most vulnerable among us. A list of AOF Steering Committee members is attached to our testimony and also available at www.advocatesforohio.org.

From the beginning of this budget process, AOF has encouraged Ohio's legislative leaders to invest in Ohio's workforce, families and community services to ensure all Ohioans recover successfully from the economic and public health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. A balanced approach to the state budget should examine current tax expenditures and new revenue opportunities to solve Ohio's most pressing needs.

Amended Substitute House Bill 110 before you today includes a number of investments that adhere to our goal of a healthy and successful recovery for all Ohioans and their families.

We are particularly pleased to see the Senate direct the Ohio Department of Medicaid to extend enrollment to new moms between 139% and 200% FPL for one-year post-partum. This provision will help keep new mothers healthy, reduce maternal mortality and begin to address racial disparities and improve health outcomes for Black mothers. This extension of Medicaid coverage for those who qualify will show the value Ohio places on new mothers and give families a stronger start.

However, we were disappointed to see the Senate direct the Department of Medicaid to suspend its current procurement process and complete a new procurement process during FY 2022.

Ohio's Medicaid managed care program has not been updated in well over a decade. Ohio Department of Medicaid's current efforts to bring a Person-Centered approach to Medicaid managed care are critical. The new contracts and the redesigned program are on track to help to achieve the following goals:

- Focus on the individual;
- Improve individual and population wellness and health outcomes;
- Create a personalized care experience;
- Support providers in continuously improving care;
- Improve care for children and adults with complex needs; and
- Increase program transparency and accountability

The proposed pause effectively derails the crucial effort to refocus the delivery of Medicaid services to the benefit of the people who need them. The pause benefits the managed care plans who provide less value and poorer health benefit to Ohio and replaces a contractual marketplace based on competition and cost efficiency. The pause halts the unification of families in the OhioRise program. The Department of Medicaid underwent an incredibly thorough process to redesign the contracts in response to direct feedback from Medicaid recipients, health care providers, provider associations, advocates and other stakeholders. Ohio will get better value and better service this year only if the new managed care contracts move forward. Children and families deserve better care. Families deserve to stay together. Taxpayers deserve an efficient and effective Medicaid program. **We urge you to remove this provision.**

We were also disappointed to learn the Senate removed the House's proposed \$190 million Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program to help pay for tax cuts. There are still more than one million Ohioans who lack internet access and they are even more disadvantaged amid the pandemic. The reality of our digital divide has come into sharp focus during this crisis.

Many of these households are in areas where the infrastructure for high-speed broadband service does not exist. Establishing the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program and appropriating \$20 million for the program, House Bill 2, which the Senate approved last month, will begin to address the \$2 billion needed to connect many of these households.

As written in House Bill 2 and passed by the House, we agree that the primary objective of the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program is accessibility. We are encouraged by comments by Senate President Huffman that his concerns around the grant program included affordability of broadband, availability of devices and digital literacy efforts.

Issues of affordability will need to be addressed if we want all Ohioans connected. We have many models of how to extend affordable utility services to low-income households and have drafted a number of amendments to the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program that would be significant first steps towards creating competition and ensuring all Ohioans can afford to be connected.

While we work for a comprehensive solution to affordability, we ask that you **reinstate the \$190 million investment in broadband infrastructure and create or fund programs that address affordability of service and devices.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Am. Sub. House Bill 110. The changes described above will help improve health outcomes for Ohioans and connect our neighbors to vital resources, learning and job opportunities to help them continue along the road to recovery from the pandemic. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

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