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**Testimony in Support of the Office of Consumers' Counsel Budget Request
House Bill 33
Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources
Susan Jagers, Director
Ohio Poverty Law Center
March 21, 2023**

Chair Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel budget request. I am the director of the Ohio Poverty Law Center which works to reduce poverty and increase justice by expanding and protecting the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) is the statewide legal representative for Ohio's residential consumers in matters related to their investor-owned electric, natural gas, telephone, and water services. The agency advocates for consumers in proceedings before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, federal regulatory agencies, appellate courts, and the Ohio General Assembly. Additionally, the agency monitors public utilities' compliance with regulatory standards for consumer protection. OCC also educates consumers about utility issues that affect their bills and quality of service.

The OCC is also a key partner for those of us who work to protect the rights of low-income Ohioans. Utility regulations and proceedings before the PUCO are complicated and the OCC staff have the expertise to partner with many nonprofits that work on behalf of consumers. The OCC staff expertise is invaluable to our work.

The OCC is funded through an assessment on the intrastate gross receipts of entities regulated by PUCO. On March 9, you heard testimony from OCC's Director Bruce Weston as to the need for increased funding to maintain the work of the agency. We support the OCC's request for a budget increase of \$700,000 to ensure they can continue the quality work on behalf of Ohio's utility customers. We appreciate that HB 33 includes an increase of \$500,000 **but we ask you to add an additional \$200,000 to fully fund the OCC's budget request.** An amendment to add the additional funds is attached. The amendment would increase OCC's budget for its consumer services from \$5.8 million to \$6.5 million each year of the biennium.

Thank you for your consideration.

_____ moved to amend as follows:

- 1 In line 120168, delete "\$6,313,267 \$6,313,267" and insert
- 2 "\$6,513,267 \$6,513,267"
- 3 In line 120169, add \$200,000 to each fiscal year
- 4 In line 120170, add \$200,000 to each fiscal year

5 The motion was _____ agreed to.

6 SYNOPSIS

7 **Office of Consumers' Counsel**

8 **Section 245.10**

9 Increases DPF appropriation item 053601, Operating
10 Expenses, by \$200,000 in each fiscal year from \$6,313,267 to
11 \$6,513,267.