



## OHIO JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

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### House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Service Committee

Interested Party Testimony on HB 33

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Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding House Bill 33. My name is Joel Potts, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association.

County department of job and family service (CDJFS) agencies administer one of the largest health, human service, and workforce systems in the nation, with one in four Ohioans receiving assistance from the local office at any point in time. The CDJFS is responsible for administering programs to the state's most economically vulnerable citizens. Systems operated through the local agencies include cash assistance, food assistance, childcare, Medicaid (including long-term care, children's health insurance and services to aged, blind and disabled), adoption, adult protective services, child protective services, foster care, refugee services, local workforce initiatives and child support programs. It is the county's primary duty to ensure clients receive the services they need and are entitled to, as well as ensure program integrity.

I would like to draw your attention to three topics that are integral to the efficient and effective administration of Ohio's JFS system:

**Investments are needed to ensure counties have a well-trained workforce that can efficiently ensure individuals who are eligible for programs are connected quickly to them, while connecting individuals to employment and training programs.**

- Ohio's local program support appropriations are the backbone of county operations, providing core funding for the local SNAP and Medicaid programs. It primarily funds front line services impacting clients and their cases. This includes eligibility determinations, quality assurance reviews, fraud investigations, information verification and transportation. Resources in these line items help stabilize families across the spectrum of JFS programs including child protection and workforce development and enable the state to draw down additional federal match.
- Along with eligibility work, county staff are also working to process millions of system-generated alerts and reported changes in circumstance (including income) to ensure those who are on benefits are indeed eligible for them and maintain regular reviews of redeterminations and renewals for programs.
- We appreciate and are supportive of the modest proposed increase in the Family Assistance – Local line item in each state fiscal year, as well as the proposed \$5M increase in SFY25 in the Medicaid program support – local line item. These resources will enable county agencies to recruit and retain knowledgeable staff and help meet federal and state program mandates.

We are pleased to be partnering with the state in identifying performance metrics that can be leveraged with these increases to ensure they are helping counties meet federal and state program priorities.

**Address the workforce shortage in critical jobs by mitigating the benefit cliff and ensuring people take the next step in their career.**

- **SNAP Employment and Training Program.** Increase funding for the already existing, but woefully underfunded SNAP Employment and Training Program. A dedicated GRF line item should be created to indicate the level of resources counties have to help unemployed and under-employed SNAP recipients find a suitable job or confidently take the next step on their career path.
- We recommend a \$10M per year GRF line item. This funding will draw down an additional 50/50 match.
  - This program is mandated by the federal government. Due to lack of funding, Ohio’s program has a lot of potential to increase its scope and efficacy. There is an intense desire in the counties to enhance work and training programs, but minimal resources to do this work.
  - Ohio’s program must be more robust in order to better serve more SNAP recipients and support Ohio’s workforce.
  - Counties are well suited to perform this critical and transformational work.
- **Employment Incentive Program for Critical Jobs.** Restore the newly created line item in the last budget, the Employment Incentive Program. This line item was created to provide flexible funding to counties so they can work with underemployed individuals to help mitigate the benefit cliff that can impact workers when taking on additional hours or an increase in wages. The as-introduced proposal zeroed out this line item.
  - We recommend a \$5M per year appropriation. These funds can serve individuals and purposes not allowed by other funding streams (i.e., addressing health insurance costs that an individual may face losing Medicaid, informal child care arrangements for before or after school care, etc.)
  - This could help encourage already employed individuals to maintain hours in critical jobs like providing home and community-based services (i.e. PASSPORT waiver services, DD waiver services, etc) as well as workers in child care centers - two areas that we know face critical shortages, and are not considered “in-demand” jobs because they do not pay enough to qualify, despite the need.

We are very appreciative of Governor DeWine’s ongoing commitment to serving children and older adults – a commitment which is evident in the review of the as-introduced version of the budget.

Proposed investments we see as necessary and vital include:

- A proposed \$4M per year increase to the adult protective services line item. This line item funds the counties in responding to reports of alleged elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Counties ensure these allegations are promptly investigated and work to connect victims to protective services. Counties coordinate these efforts with courts, prosecutors, financial institutions, the aging network, hospitals, and other members of the community involved in serving this population.
- A proposed increase in eligibility for the publicly funded child care program of up to 150% of the federal poverty level. Publicly funded child care is a critical work support for the families we serve, and quality child care is a vital component in ensuring children are ready for school.

- A proposed increase of \$25M in SFY24 and \$35M in SFY25 for the state child protection allocation; as well as other investments for best practices, family and children first councils, and other vital programs serving families and children.
- A proposed increase in eligibility for pregnant women and children up to 300% of the federal poverty level.

We are also excited to partner with the DeWine Administration and the legislature in the development of the newly proposed Department of Children and Youth. Having various programs that serve the same families under the same leadership will help coordinate these efforts and investments in a way not currently possible today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee. I am happy to answer any questions you have.