



## OHIO JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

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Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Substitute House Bill 33 Interested Party Testimony

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 33. My name is Joel Potts and I am the executive director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association (OJFSDA).

We are greatly appreciative of the new provision included in the senate budget ensuring county operating dollars. The language in the bill is necessary to safeguard local operations and the ongoing administration costs associated with the administering public assistance programs.

OJFSDA is also grateful for the ongoing plans in the budget to increase resources for child and adult protective services, as well as continued funding local efforts for fraud detection, investigations and enforcement. Funding provided by the General Assembly in the current state fiscal year is the first ever dedicated fraud funding to local agencies and are very impactful in our efforts and desire to ensure program integrity. Ohio currently ranks first in the region and in the top five states nationally for payment accuracy in the SNAP program. Continued funding will help ensure continued success.

County agencies are also pleased to see new programs to help Medicaid recipients secure meaningful employment. Counties welcome the opportunity to work with the state departments of Medicaid and Job and Family Services, as well as managed care organizations, to identify work opportunities, barriers and resources to address employment needs of residents in the Medicaid system. This comprehensive approach will bring public and private entities together to address employment needs of clients and increase job opportunities.

There are a couple of changes in the Senate budget plan that raise concerns for the counties. Ohio is one of 4 states with a mandatory SNAP E&T program. The program is woefully underfunded as highlighted to the Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force earlier this year. The sub bill substantially broadens the number of mandatory SNAP clients required to participate in the work and training programs without providing any additional funding to administer this already inadequately resourced program. To meet the new mandates and achieve success, we requested an additional \$10M per SFY of GRF, which would draw down a 50/50 federal match. Without the resources to assess, train and support work efforts, the provision will fall woefully short in state and county efforts to improve work efforts in the state.

County agencies are also concerned with the Senate plan to eliminate "categorical eligibility" for SNAP recipients. A job is the best strategy to reduce poverty. We need to do everything we can to assist clients enter the workforce, move up the economic ladder and achieve financial independence. It is what's best for the client, family, workforce, and community.

One major challenge counties experience every day in helping clients move from welfare to work are the unintended barriers created by various program requirements. Each public assistance program requires

different verifications, has different mechanisms for determining eligibility, looks at resources differently and counts assets in various manners. To reduce as much redundancy and bureaucracy as possible, when allowed, Ohio utilizes categorical eligibility to streamline and simplify our eligibility systems to more easily serve our clients, reduce administrative costs and focus our efforts on helping families stabilize their lives and gain employment. Categorical eligibility is an important component of our approach to supporting work and utilizing our limited resources to focus more on casework than paperwork.

In our work with families on assistance we often are not just cash poor, they are asset poor. They likely have no credit, or bad credit, meaning they need substantial resources to move up the economic scale and have the financial power to change their circumstances. This often means the need to relocate (including funds for cash deposits for housing, reliable transportation and work supports such as clothing). Purchasing a reliable car will also likely require a substantial downpayment and depending on the circumstances, the reliable automobile could exceed the resource limits which allow us to provide necessary work and training services.

Ohio's system needs to continue to support and encourage work. Increased incomes, added assets, and job advancement should be our goal. Based on my three decades of experience with welfare reform, increased income AND asset accumulation are going to be necessary for individuals to ultimately break from the cycle of generational poverty and decrease dependency on government benefits.

41 states currently see the value in categorical eligibility to reduce bureaucracy and support work.

OJFSDA would also request the Senate Finance Committee to reconsider plans that were included in earlier versions of the budget to ensure that caretakers can access child support services. Caretakers may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, or other individuals that have stepped up to serve as the primary caregiver for a child that is not their own. Restoration of the caretaker provisions for child support could provide an important resource for these families and prevent them from entering the child protective system.

Finally, we request the Senate to support efforts to address the placement crisis for children in Ohio's child protection system. A February 2022 report by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio regarding Ohio's placement crisis found that nearly 1 in 4 children who entered foster care in 2021 did so primarily due to their behavioral health needs, developmental delays, or involvement in the juvenile justice system rather than primarily due to abuse or neglect concerns. This report also revealed that in 2021, 6% of those youth had to spend at least one night at an agency. This crisis has exposed gaps in Ohio's treatment and placement options, especially for youth with developmental and/or intellectual challenges who also exhibit aggressive behavior, often related to trauma. Too often, these youth are forced to sleep at public children services agencies or wait in a hospital with no access to treatment. And, tragically, some parents are forced to relinquish custody when they are left with no other options and are unable to safely manage their child's behaviors at home.

We support the PCSAO efforts and respectfully request that the Senate add language to HB33 to prioritize and drive action on this issue, focusing on children with developmental and/or intellectual challenges coupled with challenging behaviors.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.