



## Advocates for Ohio's Future

Written Testimony to the Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee  
Sub HB 33, Main Operating Budget FY2024-FY2025  
May 11, 2023

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld and I am the Director of Advocates for Ohio's Future. Advocates for Ohio's Future (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 and the health and human services workforce in the critical work they do, especially as it relates to lifting up and caring for all Ohioans. A full list of AOF Steering Committee members is included at the end of my testimony and also available at [www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org). Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments on Substitute House Bill 33.

As a coalition of a broad range of health and human service organizations, we unite to identify and prioritize the greatest needs of people and families across the state. We couldn't agree more with Governor DeWine's goal of making Ohio the best state to live, work and raise a family. This is why we support public programs that provide economic security, help people get to work, support a strong recovery, and empower Ohio residents.

Ohio's Medicaid program delivers healthcare access and related community support services to more than 3.4 million Ohioans, including children, pregnant women, adults, seniors, and individuals with disabilities, across the life spectrum. The following statistics highlight this significant role in serving Ohioans:

- More than 1.3 million children are served by Medicaid.
- Over half of Ohio births are covered by Medicaid.
- More than 16,500 children are enrolled and receiving specialized services through OhioRISE.

We appreciate your investments in the last budget to expand coverage to new mothers for 12 months postpartum and to fund initiatives including OhioRISE which seek to improve care and prevent custody relinquishments for children with complex health care needs.

The budget bill as passed by the House before you today includes policies and investments that will help move Ohio towards the goal of supporting Ohioans to meet their fullest potential. Advocates for Ohio's Future is pleased to support several initiatives included in Substitute House Bill 33 including:

- MCD43: Continuous Medicaid enrollment for children from birth through age three. With continuous coverage, once young children are eligible for Medicaid, their parents would not have to worry about re-enrolling them until they start elementary school making it more likely that these young children will get their regular doctor visits, health screenings and developmental checks.
- MCD34: Grants Medicaid coverage to both pregnant women and children under age nineteen with incomes up to 300% of FPL and privately adopted children. This change will cover an additional 30,000 children and an estimated 3,500 pregnant women.
- MCD68: Rate increase for FQHCs and FQHC look-alikes that deliver affordable, high quality and comprehensive primary care to medically underserved populations, regardless of insurance status.
- MCD57: Provider rate increase for vision and eye care.
- MCD55: Dental service provider rate increase.
- MCD52: Establish a five-year program in ODM to cover doula services to strengthen maternal and infant health outcomes.
- MCD70: Requires the Medicaid program to cover the optional eligibility group consisting of certain workers with disabilities. (Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities program)

These provisions will provide a strong foundation for the future of Ohio—our children—and help increase access to vital services and care around the state.

Any discussion of supporting the health and recovery of Ohioans cannot be complete without addressing the direct care workforce crisis faced by every sector of the home and community-based services spectrum. Different rates and requirements for similar work result in competition for a small number of workers and an imbalance in the system. Although we were encouraged to see an increase in the hourly wage for direct care workers up to \$17 per hour in FY24 and \$18 in FY25, AOF supports our member organizations, disabled Ohioans, and older adults in respectfully requesting an increase up to a minimum wage of \$20 per hour for all direct care workers across the Departments of Aging, Medicaid, and Developmental Disabilities. Direct care work has been undervalued and under compensated for so long that our care systems are hitting a breaking point. Unless Ohio recognizes and rewards direct care workers for the valuable work they provide in

communities across Ohio, our care systems will continue to see high turnover, high vacancy rates, long wait lists, and more agency closures.

Equity should be an explicit consideration in constructing the budget. Laws and policies have institutionalized racism and bias against marginalized groups. Ohio should allocate resources and services to at-risk populations to ensure an individual's well-being and success are not predictable by race, class, geography, language, gender, or other relevant social factors. Governor Mike DeWine formed the COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force on April 20, 2020, in response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minorities in Ohio. The strike force contracted with the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) to develop the "COVID-19 Ohio Minority Health Strike Force Blueprint" which contains actionable recommendations to improve health outcomes and overall well-being for communities of color in Ohio. We recommend that this committee and the full general assembly consider these recommendations and commit to promoting equity and better health outcomes for all Ohioans.

Though we'd like to think the challenges of the public health and economic crises are far behind us, the impacts are still being felt across our state. Today, hundreds of thousands of children, adults, and families struggle to afford food, rent, utilities, and other basic necessities.

AOF is also concerned that thousands of Ohioans who are already struggling to make ends meet will lose resources to keep food on the table and lose healthcare coverage as COVID era flexibilities and enhanced supports unwind. We are thankful for past investments made by the previous general assembly to help support basic needs like food and housing, while also supporting our county jobs and family services agencies who connect people to the help and supports they need to get back on their feet. We encourage this committee and the full general assembly to continue to support our county jobs and family service agencies in their work to ensure their redetermination work is accurate and efficient while adhering to the rights of those enrolled in the program.

This budget is an opportunity to invest in improving the quality of life of all Ohioans. AOF and our partner organizations support policies that build an Ohio where all people and families live healthy lives in quality communities with pathways to prosperity for all.



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