

Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee
Ohio House Finance Committee
H.B. 96
Interested Party Testimony

March 11, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on H.B. 96.

My name is Maria Matzik, and I am the host of the Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee. The Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee is in response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities. The focus of the committee is to create an active space for advocates to work together to develop and create community awareness and change in the communities that we work, live, and participate in. The goal of this committee is to establish relationships with local and state officials as well as to partner with community organizations around disability related issues.

Breaking Silences is testifying today to educate you regarding the impact of the decisions that you make during this biennium budget cycle and how those decisions will shape the future of Ohio's healthcare system and the lives of countless Ohioans who depend on the programs discussed in this testimony.

Preserving Ohio's Medicaid from Devastating Federal Cuts

The importance of Ohio's Medicaid program cannot be overstated. It is a lifeline for millions of Ohioans, providing healthcare and services to those in need, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those facing financial hardships. Unfortunately, there is a looming threat of federal cuts to Medicaid that would have devastating consequences for Ohio's residents. These cuts would drastically reduce access to essential health services, making it harder for individuals to maintain their independence and quality of life. As legislators, you have an essential role in safeguarding Ohio's Medicaid program, ensuring it remains fully funded and accessible for those who depend on it.

The Need for Ohio's Medicaid Expansion Program

Ohio's Medicaid Expansion program has been a significant success. Since its implementation, hundreds of thousands of low-income individuals have gained access to life-saving healthcare services. However, many individuals still fall through the cracks of the traditional Medicaid eligibility requirements. For those who earn slightly above the poverty threshold, the lack of access to healthcare creates a barrier to workforce participation and economic stability. Without the Medicaid Expansion, these individuals will be without essential health services, and the strain on our workforce will only increase as people must make impossible decisions between healthcare and work.

Ohio's Medicaid Expansion, initiated in 2014 under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), has significantly improved healthcare access for low-income residents. Prior to the expansion, approximately 17.8% of U.S. residents were uninsured in 2006. However, Ohio consistently maintained uninsured rates below the national average during that period.

Sited in the following news sources:

[axios.com](https://www.axios.com)

The expansion enabled coverage for individuals earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level (FPL), addressing gaps where many earned too much for traditional Medicaid but too little to afford private insurance. This group often faced barriers to workforce participation due to lack of affordable healthcare. Without Medicaid Expansion, these individuals would likely remain uninsured, increasing strain on Ohio's workforce as they balance health needs with employment.

Recent data indicates that the uninsured rate among Ohioans under 65 has decreased over the past 15 years, attributed to Medicaid Expansion and other policies.

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In summary, Medicaid Expansion has been pivotal in reducing the uninsured rate and supporting workforce participation among low-income Ohioans. Ensuring continued access to healthcare for those just above the poverty line remains essential for economic stability and public health.

Connection Between Ohio's Medicaid Expansion Program and the New Medicaid Work Requirements

It is critical to understand that Ohio's Medicaid Expansion program and the newly proposed Medicaid Work Requirements directly impact each other. The work requirements aim to incentivize employment while simultaneously imposing barriers that would make Ohioans ineligible for Medicaid who do not meet work or work-related activity requirements. These changes risk reversing the progress made under Medicaid Expansion by leaving individuals who need care the most without access to health services, further exacerbating economic inequality and diminishing the workforce.

The Importance of Choice, Workforce Development, and Financial Responsibility in Ohio's Self-Direction Program

The Ohio Self-Direction program offers individuals with disabilities the autonomy to choose and control their care, while also developing and employing a vital workforce of home care workers. One of the key benefits of the program is the less stringent enrollment process for caregivers, which allows people who generally would not be Medicaid providers, and are not pursuing a career in caregiving, to participate. This flexibility is especially important for family members or informal caregivers, many of whom have limited experience but possess a deep understanding of the needs of their loved ones.

By lessening the barriers for enrollment, Ohio ensures that individuals with disabilities can receive care from people they trust, creating a more personal and individualized care experience. Furthermore, this approach helps to address the growing demand for home care workers, fostering a diverse and adaptable workforce.

Importantly, representatives from Ohio's Medicaid department have worked closely with advocates, families, caregivers, and other stakeholders throughout the development and implementation of the program. This collaboration has led to a model that is truly responsive to the needs of the individuals utilizing the services, ensuring that the program is not only effective but also aligns with the values and preferences of those it aims to serve.

Workforce development for home care workers is essential, not only for the dignity and well-being of caregivers but also for the quality of care that individuals with disabilities receive. By supporting this program, we increase fiscal responsibility and follow the Olmsted Decision by enabling Ohioans to remain in their homes with the services they require. This cooperative and inclusive approach ensures that the program is both sustainable and beneficial for all involved.

The Importance of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) PCA Program

The agency Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is experiencing an abrupt and unexpected reduction in federal funding from the Social Security Administration. This money funds the Personal Care Assistance (PCA) Program. On February 26, 2025, OOD Executive Director Kevin Miller brought these funding concerns to the public's attention during his budget testimony to the Ohio House Health Committee. OOD continues to seek answers and solutions with its federal partners to resolve and restore funding for PCA.

The PCA Program is working diligently with OOD's Division of Fiscal Management and community partners to identify and maximize funds that may be available to the PCA Program. The Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Personal Care Assistance (PCA) program provides essential support for individuals with disabilities needing help with daily living activities to gain and maintain employment, seek, and participate in higher education programs, and maintain independence. This program allows people to live independently in their communities, and it is crucial that we work to preserve and enhance this program.

The impact of the unexpected reduction in federal funding from the Social Security Administration to individuals who rely on the PCA program will be significant, stripping away services and directly impacting their ability to maintain employment, pursue a higher education, and most importantly remain independent in their homes and fully participate in society. We must work together with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to save this program, reinstate the SSR reimbursement rate, and ensure that Ohioans with disabilities continue to have access to this program to ensure their continued participation in Ohio's economy and workforce.

Again, as legislators, you have an essential role in safeguarding these programs and services by ensuring that this program remains fully funded and available for those who depend and rely on it.

The Role of Ohio's Centers for Independent Living

Ohio's Centers for Independent Living (CILs) play a vital role in empowering individuals with disabilities to live, work, and thrive in the communities that they choose to live in. They provide resources, advocacy, and services to help people live independently and participate fully in their communities. The work of the CILs is invaluable in ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to housing, transportation, education, employment, and home care services and supports. Funding for these centers is crucial for the independence and success of Ohioans with disabilities.

Impact of MyCare Ohio Managed Care Plans on In-Home Caregivers and Direct Care Workforce

Finally, I want to address a significant issue related to the MyCare Ohio managed care plans. Currently, the structure of these plans allows companies to pay in-home and agency caregivers at rates that are lower than the standard Medicaid reimbursement rate. This impacts caregivers, and the individuals who they provide care to, by forcing them to accept reduced rates or leave their individuals without coverage. This creates an uncertain situation for individuals who rely on home care services. They may lose access to caregivers, forcing them into institutions which violate their right to autonomy, dignity, freedom, and independence. Not to mention a reduction yet again in the workforce because many individuals receiving direct care support are partially or fully employed and contribute to Ohio's tax revenue.

It is equally important to understand that though Medicaid increased reimbursement rates for Independent Providers and home care agencies in the last biennium budget - and thank you to Ohio's General Assembly and Governor DeWine for supporting that increase - the managed care plans are not required to increase reimbursement rates to contracted providers. This leads to a disparity in pay that directly affects Ohio's direct care workforce and individuals who rely on the services they provide. By not reimbursing caregivers at the full Medicaid rate, managed care plans exacerbate the strain on the workforce and further threaten the ability of individuals to receive consistent and reliable in-home care.

In conclusion, I urge the members of this committee to consider the profound impact that changes to Medicaid and home care services would have on Ohio's communities, our workforce, and the long-term sustainability of our healthcare system. Preserving Ohio's Medicaid Expansion, maintaining the Ohio Self-Direction program, supporting and advocating for the PCA program, and ensuring that managed care plans reimburse caregivers at fair rates are all critical actions to ensure that individuals with disabilities can remain in their homes, live independently, and continue to contribute to the workforce.

To reiterate, the decisions you make will shape the future of Ohio's healthcare system and the lives of countless Ohioans who depend on these programs to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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