

March 5, 2025

HB96 Budget Bill

Medicaid Funding

Thank you Chair Gross, Vice Chair Barhost, Ranking Member Baker and members of the House Medicaid Committee. My name is Kelli Hykes, Director of Government Relations and Advocacy for Ohio Nurses Association and I am here on behalf of the nearly 200,000 registered nurses and allied health professionals working in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, community agencies and other health care settings across the state.

We have grave concerns about state of Medicaid in Ohio. Given likely changes in Medicaid and the ACA coming from Congress, it is critical that Ohio identify ways to protect access to healthcare coverage. Many people will speak to the need for safety net services and debunk myths about Medicaid fraud. Others will tell you very personal stories of how Medicaid literally saved their life and how their elderly loved ones were able to get nursing care through Medicaid that allowed them to continue working and caring for their own children. Instead of reiterating those stories, I will this time to focus on three key points, but at any time we would be happy to provide additional evidence.

First, while proponents are framing the issue as state increasing Medicaid funding overall in FY 2026 and 2027, what this budget proposal does is eliminate coverage for 700,000 Ohioans that have come to rely on Medicaid expansion. This budget proposal is a cut to services.

A report on the impact of Medicaid expansion in Ohio found that it made it easier for people to work, look for work, and care for family members. It also has offered significant support for people to treat mental illness and substance use disorders.

These patients will be forced to delay care and seek expensive treatment in emergency departments, which are already understaffed, particularly in rural hospitals. The cost goes beyond that of the individual and will be felt in communities through diminished population health, workforce readiness, and longer patient wait times for many.

Further, nurses and other health care professionals are already stretched thin. Hospitals, clinics, and in-patient facilities rely heavily on Medicaid to cover the cost of patient care. When that is eliminated, we see compromised staffing levels in facilities that serve lower income populations. For example, Medicaid currently covers about half of all births in Ohio. If those patients are not

covered, they will likely forgo prenatal care, increasing complications, costs, and staffing needs at the same time that there will be less money available to hire qualified healthcare providers.

Finally, it is important to note that the work requirements that are embedded into this proposal have proven dysfunctional already. They will create a bureaucracy to determine what is considered “work”, what is considered “looking for work” and the appeals process that can delay access to care that would actually enable people to get back into the workforce. The federal government rejected Ohio’s plan for a work requirement already, and this approach has proven to fail in Arkansas and Georgia.

We don’t need to create a program to require work when all evidence shows that Medicaid expansion helps people stay employed or get their health conditions under control enough to embark back into the workforce.

In conclusion, Ohio Nurses Association urges you to increase funding for Medicaid commiserate with costs over the next two years. We request that provisions to eliminate the expansion program be stricken from the proposal. We offer that a work requirement actually harm people who use Medicaid to control their health so they can get back into the workforce while also creating a bureaucratic nightmare. But most of all, we implore you to put patients and healthcare workers above politics to fund Medicaid appropriately.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out to me, Kelli Hykes, directly at [khykes@ohnurses.org](mailto:khykes@ohnurses.org) or our contract lobbyist Kevin Futryk at [Kevin@gov-advantage.com](mailto:Kevin@gov-advantage.com).