



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Interested Party

HB 96, Main Operating Budget FY2026-FY2027

May 30, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Sarah Hudacek and I am the Coalition Manager of Advocates for Ohio's Future. Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of state and local health and human services policy, advocacy and provider organizations that strive to strengthen families and communities through health, human services, and early care & education.

AOF was founded 15 years ago with the recognition that Ohioans don't live their lives in siloes and that unaddressed needs will follow a person throughout their life span. Needs are often not isolated to one area of life. Our public policy and funding choices should reflect the interconnectedness of health and human services and invest in systems that can truly wrap around Ohioans in communities across the state.

With that in mind, I'd like to address a few budget provisions that would impact the health of Ohioans throughout their lives:

Protecting Children's Futures - Lead Poisoning Prevention

Ohio children face a heightened risk of lead poisoning at an early age. More than 2/3 of Ohio's housing was built before 1980, making it more likely to have lead hazards, and children live in more than 427,000 of these homes. Exposure to lead paint dust in old homes is the number one source of lead poisoning, and Ohio has the second highest rate of children testing positive for elevated blood lead levels in the country.¹

In the House-passed budget, the Department of Health's lead abatement and lead-safe home fund programs were cut by 96% compared to current funding levels. There is no cure for lead poisoning and the health effects of lead poisoning are irreversible and can fundamentally impact a child's development, learning, and behavior throughout their lives.

Children are our future. AOF joins the Ohio Lead-Free Kids Coalition in asking that the Lead Safe Home Fund (DOH 440530) and Lead Abatement (DOH 440527) lines be restored to the Governor's as-introduced levels.

¹ <https://case.edu/schubertcenter/sites/default/files/2020-06/Ohio%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Lead-Free%20Children.pdf>

Supporting Families and Children - Child Care

For low-income families, child care is one of the largest, most burdensome expenses. The cost of child care has risen substantially in recent years, and child care now costs an average of \$9,500 per year for preschool-aged children, \$11,000 per year for toddler care, and \$12,300 for infant care. Lack of access to affordable child care close to work and home is one of the biggest barriers to work that Ohio families face.

AOF asks for restoration of the as-introduced increase to Publicly Funded Child Care initial eligibility to 160 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as well as the restoration of the as-introduced investments in the Child Care Choice Voucher program to serve families up to 200 percent FPL.

Working Families Need Relief - Child Tax Credit

AOF strongly supports the proposal included in the as-introduced budget to create a state refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC) of up to \$1,000 per child under age 7 per year in families with incomes under \$94,000 for people who are married filing jointly and under \$69,000 for single tax filers.

A large body of research supports the positive impacts of investments in early childhood that echo across the lifespan. During the expanded federal CTC in 2021, 90 percent of Ohio households who received the credit used the additional funds to cover basic needs, such as food, clothing, rent, mortgage, and utilities, or for education expenses.²

Analyses show that the as-introduced CTC proposal would result in a \$740 million total economic benefit, with every dollar spent on the tax credit yielding \$6.65 in economic benefit to the state. Over a longer term, the credit would increase Ohioans' future earnings by \$500 million, save the state \$39 million in child healthcare expenses, save \$27 million in parent healthcare expenses, and save \$120 million by diverting families from child protection involvement, to name only a few estimated future impacts of a refundable state CTC.³

This proposed CTC would also reach the vast majority of Ohio taxpayers. In tax year 2022, 70 percent of Ohio taxpayers reported incomes below \$65,000 and 81 percent reported incomes below \$95,000.⁴ With a credit that phases-in as income increases, this credit would also support work, especially as families face benefits cliffs associated with even small increases in income and as families build a foundation of economic stability for their futures.

AOF asks that the Senate invest in Ohio's children and families by restoring the as-introduced Child Tax Credit in the state budget.

Support the Efficiency of SNAP - SNAP Administration

As we continue to see the cost of living and cost of groceries increase, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical program to ensure that Ohio families are able to work, go to school, and be engaged in their communities, all while being fueled by food purchased from grocery stores in their communities with fully federally funded benefits.

² <https://www.healthpolicyohio.org/files/publications/datasnapshotctcfinal2.pdf>

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://tax.ohio.gov/researcher/tax-analysis/tax-data-series/tds1>

Reporting changes included in the House-passed budget would increase the administrative burden of the SNAP program on county Job and Family Services case workers and on SNAP participants (RC 5101.546, JFSCD36). These new provisions would require SNAP participants to report their income each month, instead of the current 6-month recertifications and the already existing requirements for participants to report any change that would impact their eligibility for the program.

In practice, this would mean Ohioans would see a fluctuation in their benefit levels from one month to the next if they pick up an extra shift or two or work overtime, even if the income changes don't impact their eligibility.

This would exacerbate the SNAP benefits cliff and reverse recent strides Ohio has taken to turn the cliff into an off-ramp. AOF asks that these cumbersome reporting requirements be removed.

Protect Health Coverage for Working Ohioans - Medicaid

Advocates for Ohio's Future is also part of Ohio Medicaid Matters, a coalition of more than 80 organizations, including the state's leading human services agencies, health advocacy associations and hospital systems. We believe Medicaid is foundational to Ohio's economic success, and we want as many Ohioans as possible to have the health care they need to work and thrive.

As currently proposed, "shall" trigger language in HB 96 would immediately discontinue medical assistance for the 770,000 Ohioans in the Medicaid expansion group if federal funding dips below 90 percent.

Ohioans cut out of Medicaid by this trigger would face a difficult landscape of alternatives to coverage. Employees earning less than 200 percent FPL are less likely to work for an employer who offers insurance, and less likely to be eligible for that insurance, than higher income workers.⁵ Only 25 percent of Ohioans eligible for Medicaid expansion would be eligible for employer-sponsored insurance.⁶

Those who are eligible for employer coverage may face high out-of-pocket costs, with high insurance premiums and high deductibles relative to their income. The Healthcare.gov Marketplace might not fill this coverage gap either, because those enrolling in the Marketplace must earn more than 100 percent FPL.⁷ It makes sense, then, that research shows that the majority of people become uninsured after losing Medicaid.⁸

Without Medicaid expansion coverage, low-income Ohioans would be more likely to delay preventive care until health needs become crises, leading to poorer health outcomes, higher costs of care, and potential loss of life. When it comes to children, data shows a correlation between parents' Medicaid enrollment and children's enrollment, meaning that when parents lose Medicaid coverage, children are more likely to lose coverage, as well.

Medicaid expansion is a shared state and federal expense, with the federal government covering 90 percent of the costs of services and the state covering just 10 percent. This trigger provision would eliminate

⁵ <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/trends-in-employer-based-health-coverage/>

⁶ <https://www.healthpolicyohio.org/files/publications/policyconsiderationsmedicaidexpansionfinal.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/issue-brief/explaining-health-care-reform-questions-about-health-insurance-subsidies/>

⁸ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/what-happens-after-people-lose-medicaid-coverage/>

expansion coverage if the FMAP drops by even 1 percent.

AOF joins Ohio Medicaid Matters in asking lawmakers to enable flexibility and to change the trigger language from “shall” to “may.”

Stabilize Ohio Families - Ohio Housing Trust Fund

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund is the primary source of state funding for local homelessness, emergency home repair, and affordable housing services. The Trust Fund supports emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, supportive housing programs, repair and accessibility modifications for older adults and Ohioans with disabilities, rehabilitation and development of affordable rental housing, and homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing services.

Funding is allocated to projects in all 88 Ohio counties, with at least half of Trust Fund resources awarded to rural areas each year. Funding is also targeted to those who need it most, with 75 percent of the funds required to help Ohioans at or below 50 percent of the area median income.

Ohio continues to face a deficit of available affordable housing rental units, with a shortage of 264,083 rental units for the 438,108 extremely low-income renter households. Several Ohio counties have fewer affordable rental units available for every 100 extremely low-income households than do some of the most expensive cities in the nation. Darke County, Delaware County, Van Wert County, Wayne County, Williams County, and Wood County all have fewer available affordable rental units than do New York City or San Francisco.⁹

In state fiscal years 2020 and 2021, the Ohio Housing Trust Fund received \$45 million in mirrored county recorder fees and was able to leverage \$167 million from other private and federal sources. With the ability to leverage additional funds, each year, the Trust Fund supported more than 3,100 full-time equivalent jobs, generated \$431 million in economic output, or \$9.55 for every \$1 spent, and generated \$35 million in tax revenue for the state.¹⁰

The House-passed budget, however, would remove the requirement for counties to remit the Ohio Housing Trust Fund mirrored fee revenue to the state. This would move Ohio to a county-by-county approach, which would create new layers of bureaucracy, burden smaller counties without the staff capacity to undertake administration of new funds and programs, and would disrupt services.

Many OHTF-funded emergency home repair and homelessness programs cover a dozen or more rural counties. The House’s proposed amendment would make these multi-county services unworkable for many local area agencies on aging, community action agencies, and Habitat affiliates that serve rural areas. Shifting OHTF administration to the counties will decrease overall housing resources in areas with the highest needs, and lead to greater housing insecurity and homelessness.

AOF supports restoring the current funding structure for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and replacing any changes with a study committee to thoroughly evaluate the Trust Fund and make recommendations to

⁹ <https://cohhio.org/2025-gap-report-shows-shortage-of-affordable-homes-in-ohio/>

¹⁰ <https://ohiohome.org/news/documents/OHTF-FactSheet.pdf>

improve its operations and effectiveness, and to consider ways to maintain an adequate, sustainable funding source.

Supporting Healthy Aging - Senior Community Services and Adult Protective Services

The Senior Community Services program provides flexible funding to Area Agencies on Aging for non-Medicaid services, including home modifications and repairs, transportation, meals, housing assistance, and personal care. These supports prevent social isolation and delay and divert from enrollment in Medicaid and entrance into nursing facilities.

For every \$1 invested in these healthy aging interventions, the state and local communities see a \$3.20 return on investment. AOF supports the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the Ohio Aging Advocacy Coalition¹¹ in asking for additional investment in these healthy aging supports with an increase of \$1 million in Senior Community Services per fiscal year.

The Adult Protective Services system helps to keep older adults safe and healthy in their homes and communities by protecting and advocating on behalf of older Ohioans who are survivors of or at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

AOF thanks the House for the much-needed investment of an additional \$2 million per fiscal year in Adult Protective Services to support prevention and response to elder abuse and neglect and we join the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services in asking that this investment be maintained in the Senate.

Thank you to the committee for your diligence throughout this budget process. I welcome questions via email at shudacek@communitysolutions.com.

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¹¹ <https://www.hannah.com/ShowDocument.aspx?ItemID=139275>