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Sub HB 96 Interested Party Testimony  
Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Tim Johnson, Senior Policy Advocate  
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, my name is Tim Johnson, and I am a senior policy advisor with The Ohio Poverty Law Center. Thank you for allowing me to offer interested party testimony on our priorities for Substitute House Bill 96, the biennial operating budget.

Lead Poisoning Prevention

Lead is a powerful neurotoxin that has devastating lifelong effects on young children. There is no safe level of lead in a child's blood and there is no cure for lead poisoning. Over two-thirds of Ohio homes were built before 1980 which means they have potential lead hazards, and Ohio has the second highest number of children testing positive for elevated blooded lead levels in the country.

Over the last several operating budgets both the Governor and the legislature have made key investments in lead poisoning prevention including an innovative grant program via the Lead Safe Home Fund. We are shocked that after years of important investment, the substitute bill completely removes all funding for lead poisoning prevention programming from the Ohio Department of Health. As previously stated, Ohio faces significant challenges when it comes to lead poisoning, and we need support in order to serve children across the state. Large metropolitan areas such as Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland, may have resources to operate their own lead poisoning prevention services, however many other smaller localities do not. Loss of the lead safe home funding means we are leaving villages, smaller cities and counties to fend for themselves and with limited resources. Many of these places will forgo lead poisoning prevention altogether. Children and their families will ultimately bear the brunt of the decision to disinvest in lead

poisoning prevention; they will lose access to programs to remove lead in their homes and to resources that will help keep their children safe.

The funding that was cut was used for a variety of different programs and initiatives to combat lead poisoning in our communities including:

- Testing children for elevated blood lead levels
- Conducting lead investigations to identify lead hazards
- Paying exam and licensure fees to create and bolster our lead hazard workforce
- Intervention Services for families of lead poisoned children
- Funding for local communities to start or expand lead poisoning prevention services
- Funding for lead hazard control services to remove lead from homes

Many of these programs will disappear due to the cut in funding and what little might remain will be severely limited in scope.

Childhood lead poisoning is a significant—but fixable—challenge. The Ohio Department of Health has abated more than 500 homes to date and there are more than 200 Ohio families currently waiting for lead hazard control services. If lead poisoning prevention funding is not restored, these families will not receive the services they need to make their homes safe. Cutting funding will not help the state realize cost savings; lead poisoned children will ultimately cost the state more due to the downstream effects associated with lead poisoning. Investing upfront in lead poisoning prevention will save the state money by catching lead poisoned children early and working to mitigate the harmful effects, as well as preventing future children from becoming poisoned in the first place. We urge the committee to support an amendment that would give the Ohio Department of Health \$5 million in each fiscal year for statewide lead poisoning prevention programs.

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#### Medicaid Trigger Language

We also urge the committee to reconsider the language related to the Ohio Medicaid's expansion population that could have significant impacts on

Ohioans' access to health care. Approximately 770,000 Ohioans are covered under Medicaid expansion. An adult eligible under expansion can earn an income up to 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which is approximately \$21,597 under the 2025 guidelines. While Medicaid "trigger" language is a discussion across all states that have adopted expansion, only nine have laws similar to House Bill 96's proposed language.

In addition, House Bill 96 contains additional language that could significantly impact health care access or other services provided to Ohioans. This language allows Ohio to mirror any actions by the federal government to reduce, discontinue, pause, or suspend programs for which Ohio has a corresponding state program receiving federal funding. This provision is exceedingly vague as to the impact that it could have on specific programs. Proposed Sections 126.70 and 126.10 would both have significant impact on Ohioans and the health and well-being of individuals and families. We are advocating for the removal of these sections as written or would request substantial changes to the language to allow for more flexibility in timelines for the Ohio Department of Medicaid's response to changes in federal funding.

### Legal Aid Funding

Ohio's regional legal aid offices served more than 135,875 Ohioans last year including 59,000 children, and 18,000 seniors. Legal Aid helped 2,700 Ohioans seal or expunge their criminal records and 765 Ohioans reinstate driver's licenses, removing barriers to employment. Legal Aid helped nearly 5,000 domestic violence survivors achieve safety and helped thousands of Ohioans with housing stability through eviction and foreclosure assistance. Thanks to a generous appropriation of \$1million dollars each fiscal year, Ohio's legal aid offices can focus on and offer specific services to both veterans and Ohioans suffering from substance use disorder. In 2024 Ohio legal aid offices served more than 3700 veterans 4700 Ohioans with substance use disorder.

Serving veterans and those suffering with substance use disorder represents an important part of the work done by legal aid, so we are disappointed that funding to serve these vulnerable populations was cut. We urge the Ohio Senate to please restore the \$1 million each fiscal year that was cut in the substitute bill.

Ohio's operating budget reflects the state's collective priorities. The Ohio General Assembly has the opportunity to pass a budget that uplifts low-income Ohioans, we hope you will consider our requests for HB 96. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I am happy to answer questions at this time.