

Testimony to the Ohio Senate

House 96

In November 2013, I made the difficult decision to press domestic violence charges against my husband. Just two weeks later, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and determined medically unable to continue working. These back-to-back life-altering events thrust my three children and me from the stability of middle-class life into the harsh reality of deep poverty.

Before that moment, I had earned a Master of Arts in Teaching from Miami University. I was licensed by the State of Ohio as a Highly Qualified teacher in Integrated Language Arts for grades 7–12. I loved teaching and was only able to do so for three years. I still miss it dearly.

After my diagnosis, my children and I relied on critical public support. SNAP benefits have helped put food on the table, though they rarely last the entire month. Free and reduced-price school meals helped stretch our limited resources. School fee waivers allowed my children to participate in their education without added financial strain.

Before child support was established—and during times when their father was incarcerated or unemployed—TANF provided emergency assistance to help us meet basic needs. Even so, the help was often barely enough to cover necessities like toilet paper or personal hygiene products.

Medicaid has been essential—not just for me to treat and manage my disease, but also to ensure my children receive consistent medical, dental, and vision care. Without it, we would be entirely without access to the care we need to survive and thrive.

There is a dangerous misconception that families like mine are “living large” on government benefits. The truth is quite the opposite. These programs have provided only the bare minimum needed to get by—and even then, the challenges are relentless. There are too few Medicaid-accepting providers, and truly affordable housing is nearly impossible to find.

I urge this committee to preserve and strengthen programs like SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and affordable housing initiatives. These lifelines should be expanded to truly support families working to rebuild stability—not chipped away due to assumptions about fraud or dependency. Public programs must be designed to lift people out of poverty, not trap them in cycles of surveillance and scarcity.

Thank you for listening to my story. The decisions made in these rooms directly affect the dignity, health, and future of families like mine.

Respectfully,

Jen Mazzuckelli