



**Advocates for Ohio's Future**

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[www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org)

TESTIMONY

ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

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### **Budget Solutions for a Safe, Healthy and Thriving Ohio**

Advocates for Ohio's Future is a statewide coalition of over 475 organization that advocate for health and human services budget and policy solutions so all Ohioans live better lives.

We want to share some perspectives on how our state is doing and where targeted investments are needed to ensure that Ohio is a great place for all Ohioans to live and work.

We agree with Governor Kasich and state lawmakers - jobs are fundamental for a strong economy, stable families, and individual well-being. We believe that our communities thrive when people are safe, have good jobs and can afford the basics. When families can pay for the basics—like housing, child care, food, and repairs—that spending strengthens the economy and supports local business. When people can't afford the basics, the economy slows down. A slow economy harms the local community, including businesses and Ohioans at all income levels who call it home.

Bold policy reform and investments are needed so Ohioans can climb the ladder up and out of poverty. We need targeted investments in our greatest asset – our people.

Before people are able to lift themselves up out of poverty through the use of training and education, they must be able to meet their basic needs. If they or their children are hungry, if they have no means of transportation, if they have untreated health issues, if they have an active opioid addiction, if they do not feel safe in their homes – those have to be addressed so that people can leverage training and education to better their life situation. Targeted, smart investments in human services—including food assistance, health care, early education, behavioral health, long-term services and supports, housing and child welfare—promote and support a productive workforce.

Sadly, the harsh reality for too many workers is that a job does not always mean a living. While Ohio is in the midst of a modest economic recovery, over the last ten years the median family income in Ohio has declined 13%. In 2003, median family income was \$53,800. In 2013, it was \$46,875. While Ohio's families are bringing in less money, the costs to support a family – food, housing, child care, health care, education, utilities, and transportation - have gone up. Further, while overall unemployment has fallen in the past few years, there is an economic trend toward more low-wage, part-time and temporary jobs.

Human services play a key role in stabilizing individuals and families, so they can compete and thrive in the 21st century economy. In order to make sure all Ohioans can participate in the economic recovery, Ohio needs to do more to make sure low-wage families and communities are stable and have the appropriate education and skills to be competitive in our new economy. We have an opportunity to prepare Ohioans to acquire and maintain quality jobs, so in the long run, they can support themselves and their families. It will take bold public investments and policy changes to strengthen Ohio's workforce and make all Ohioans competitive.



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### Advocates for Ohio's Future has identified four policy areas ripe for bold reform and investment:

- (1) Ohioans need **person-centered work preparation and supports** to help them bridge the gap between low-wage earnings and what they need to provide for themselves and their families. Ohioans should be able to meet their basic needs, including food, housing, health care, and child care. Our goal is to establish a person-centered program to prepare Ohioans to acquire and maintain quality jobs, so in the long run, they can support themselves and their families. Public investment and policy changes are needed to strengthen Ohio's workforce and make sure the basic human needs are met for all Ohioans.
- (2) **We need to invest in programs that support working families.** Unfortunately, a job does not always mean a living. Between poverty and self-sufficiency is an income range where low-wage employees and their families receive support and stabilization from public programs. Ohio should promote upward mobility in the workforce and a smoother transition to self-sufficiency by restructuring eligibility for work support programs and making the state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable. We have an opportunity to reform child care eligibility to support working families transitioning out of poverty and ensure stable learning environments for Ohio's children.
- (3) We should **build and strengthen Ohio's direct service workforce** – people providing care for individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living in their own homes. The direct service workforce is expected to grow more than any other sector in the next five years, outpacing retail, teachers and fast food workers. We are concerned about the shortages of direct service workers in Ohio as our state's population of older adults and people with disabilities grows. Shortages lead to inefficiencies and poor health outcomes; shortages can also force individuals needing assistance to move from home to more costly institutional care. We support better outcomes of care, improved health of the general population and more efficient use of resources.
- (4) While we see good jobs and a strong economy as keys to success for our state, we also believe it's important to **ensure the safety of older Ohioans.** We support the recommendations of the Adult Protective Services (APS) Funding Workgroup and ongoing efforts to ensure that older adults in all counties are safe from neglect, abuse and exploitation. We have an opportunity to strengthen the APS system in this budget to ensure that older Ohioans are safe by committing the energy and resources needed now and in the future.

Working together, we can ensure that Ohioans are safe, healthy and productive. We can strengthen our workforce and ensure that every community has jobs that boost the local economy and provide opportunity for all – full time jobs, jobs with benefits, and jobs that offer career advancement. Our state budget priorities make a difference. It's time to reinvest in Ohio.