



Advocates for Ohio's Future

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TESTIMONY

ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

HB 64

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Budget Solutions for a Safe, Healthy and Thriving Ohio

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus, and members of the Committee.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a statewide coalition of over 475 organizations that advocate for health and human services budget and policy measures that will help all Ohioans live better lives.

We agree with Governor Kasich and state lawmakers - jobs are fundamental for a strong economy, stable families, and individual well-being. Communities thrive when people are working.

The harsh reality for many workers is that a job does not always mean a living. We are living in an era of wage stagnation. The median income has declined 13% over the last decade. Yet, costs to support a family have continued to rise. And while unemployment has fallen in recent years, there is a trend toward more low-wage, part-time and temporary jobs.

Human services play a key role in stabilizing individuals and families. To enable all Ohioans to participate in our evolving economy, Ohio must ensure that low-wage workers and their families have the necessary health, education and job skills to be competitive. It will take bold public investments and policy changes to strengthen Ohio's workforce and make all Ohioans competitive.

AOF has identified four lead policy areas ripe for reform and investment:

- (1) Many Ohioans need **person-centered work preparation** to acquire and maintain jobs, so they can begin to support themselves and their families. To accomplish this, public investment and policy changes are needed. AOF supports the intensive case management program approach proposed by the Governor, which we understand the General Assembly supports. We will work with the Ohio Healthier Buckeye Advisory Council and others to establish a strong program.
- (2) **Ohio should invest in programs that support working families.** Unfortunately, a job does not always mean a reasonable standard of 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 and the transition to self-sufficiency by increasing eligibility for child care assistance with reasonable controls and making the state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable. We can also ensure stable learning environments for children by establishing 12-month continuous eligibility.
- (3) We should **strengthen Ohio's direct service workforce** – people providing care for individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living in their own homes. This workforce is expected to grow more than any other employment sector in the next five years.



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We are concerned about shortages of these workers as our state's population of older adults and people with disabilities grows. Shortages lead to inefficiencies and poor health outcomes, and can force individuals to move from home to more costly institutional care. The budget protects higher reimbursements for primary care physicians and wage increases for agency nurses. It should improve the wages and conditions for these direct care workers.

- (4) While good jobs and a strong economy are keys to a greater quality of life for Ohioans, it's important to **ensure the safety of older Ohioans**. We support the recommendations of the Adult Protective Services (APS) Funding Workgroup. But we believe more resources are needed to ensure that older adults in all counties are safe from neglect, abuse and exploitation. We believe an additional \$20 million is needed to accomplish that goal.

In addition to these four lead areas, there are related areas where AOF partners with other member organizations. These include food assistance, child welfare, behavioral health, housing, and Medicaid.

- (5) We are grateful, with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, for the additional assistance for food programs in the substitute bill.
- (6) We believe, with PCSAO, that \$20 million should be appropriated to protect our children.
- (7) We support, with the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers, the maintenance of the status quo regarding behavioral health, so more work can be done to improve service capacity.
- (8) With COHHIO, we support the current approach to the Housing Trust Fund and,
- (9) For Medicaid, we propose restoration of eligibility to 200% FPL for pregnant women, the Breast and Cervical Cancer program, and Family Planning, to further our goal of reducing infant mortality. We will participate in discussion of the Health Savings Account proposal in the Senate.

Working together, we can ensure that Ohioans are safe, healthy and productive. We can strengthen our workforce, the local economy, and opportunity for all. Our state budget priorities make a difference.

It's time to reinvest in Ohio.