

June 7, 2017

Chairperson Oelslager and Ranking Member Skindell and member of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Gloria Aron and I am a member of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality/NOBLE and a resident of Cuyahoga County.

I am here today to ask you to consider these facts in formulating our budget priorities and to insure that they meet the needs of our citizens. Ohio has not fully recovered from the recession;

- Our unemployment rate is 5.1% but many have quit looking for work;
- Many new jobs are at lower pay and without health care benefits;
- One third of all Clevelanders live in poverty and once ranked second highest in the country;
- Many Ohioans still have no health care;
- At least 517* Cuyahoga County residents died of drug overdoses in 2016; and
- Ohio has the largest number of drug over-doses in the Country and at least 517 alone in Cuyahoga County in 2016. The number continues to grow in 2017. At the current rate of overdose deaths in Cuyahoga County, sadly, we will surely surpass the number of deaths in 2016.
- Drug abuse touches us all including a 12 year old boy who found his mother dead of an overdose to my 20 year old granddaughter addicted to heroin.

We have huge problems and must work together to solve them, just as we did with Medicaid Expansion. Now, 700,000 Ohioans have access to health care including mental health and drug abuse programs. We must be committed to insuring that these 700,000 Ohioans keep their Medicaid coverage as the program exists today with no \$20.00 per month premium.

People are on Medicaid because they cannot afford insurance so it should be obvious that they cannot afford a monthly fee. I realize when you add all our Medicaid programs together, the costs are high but are you ready to tell a senior they can no longer stay in their nursing home or a mother that her sick child no longer has CHIP? Cutting Medicaid will not only affect those receiving these programs but what about the hospitals and health clinics? People will still get sick but now uninsured will go back to using the emergency room as their health care provider. Will this be cost effective to the State of Ohio? What will this do to the stability of the hospitals and how many jobs will be lost? Will cuts to Medicaid destabilize the economy of small towns throughout the State? Are we to tell an addict seeking help that we cannot help you as there are NO treatment beds available?

The future of the Affordable Care Act/ACA may be uncertain but here in Ohio with your leadership we can assure that all our Medicaid programs will remain in place and are fair to all citizens. When I testified in front of the House Finance Committee I was asked how, "do we pay for this." Well, there are two possible ways: One, don't cut taxes; and two, push the Governor to use the two billion dollar Rainy Day Fund to cover the difference. Members of the Committee, it is raining.

page 2.

Health and Medicaid Sub-Committee of the Senate Finance Committee

Please make a strong Medicaid program your first priority in this budget.

Gloria Aron

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*Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office Heroin and Fentanyl Related Deaths in Cuyahoga County; February 6, 2017.