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**Testimony in Support of the Office of Consumers' Counsel Budget Request**  
**Am. Sub. HB 110**  
**Ohio Senate General Government Budget Committee**  
**Susan Jagers, Director**  
**Ohio Poverty Law Center**  
**May 4, 2021**

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel budget request. I am the director of the Ohio Poverty Law Center which works to reduce poverty and increase justice by expanding and protecting the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) is the statewide legal representative for Ohio's residential consumers in matters related to their investor-owned electric, natural gas, telephone, and water services. The agency advocates for consumers in proceedings before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, federal regulatory agencies, appellate courts, and the Ohio General Assembly. Additionally, the agency monitors public utilities' compliance with regulatory standards for consumer protection. OCC also educates consumers about utility issues that affect their bills and quality of service.

The OCC is also a key partner for those of us who work to protect the rights of low-income Ohioans. Utility regulations and proceedings before the PUCO are complicated and the OCC staff have the expertise to partner with many nonprofits that work on behalf of consumers. The OCC staff expertise is invaluable to our work.

The OCC is funded through an assessment on the intrastate gross receipts of entities regulated by PUCO. Last week, you heard testimony from OCC's Director Bruce Weston as to the need for increased funding to maintain the work of the agency. We support the OCC's request for a budget increase of \$700,000 to ensure they can continue the quality work on behalf of Ohio's utility customers. Am. Sub. HB 110 includes an increase of \$100,000 but we ask you to add an additional \$600,000 to fully fund the OCC's budget request. That would increase OCC's budget for its consumer services from \$5.54 million to \$6.24 million each year of the biennium.

Thank you for your consideration.