



# Secular Humanists of Western Lake Erie

February 10, 2021

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, my name is Douglas Berger, and I am writing today on behalf of our members in opposition to Senate Bill 17.

We are simply tired of the constant attempts to shame and punish people in our state who need public assistance. It seems every session a member of the statehouse introduces another ill-advised attack on lower income individuals and families. These attacks are always based not on real problems needing to be solved - like reducing the causes for needing public assistance - but debunked biases of the writers of the bills playing to their base of voters who also wrongly believe the worst in those needing assistance.

Senate Bill 17 is a bad bill based on bad information. Just one example is that Ohio was approved to require more work requirements for those on Medicaid. It was supposed to take effect on January 1st but was set aside because of the pandemic.

Last October in a news report, Maureen Corcoran, director of the Ohio Department of Medicaid explained: *"Until the pandemic is ended, we are not allowed to make a change in our program like that or to terminate people."*

As part of the federal CARES Act coronavirus funding that Congress passed last March, state Medicaid agencies are receiving more money to fight the outbreak and in return for that the state can't reduce eligibility for any category.

There is still a pandemic going on but yet SB 17 was introduced.

Another false basis of this bill is the idea there is rampant fraud in the SNAP program. This is another attack on poor people that is made every session and is never proven with actual evidence or even a legal process.

In 2016, then State Auditor David Yost audited the Ohio SNAP program and found \$31,000 in questionable spending. The audit cost \$48,000 to perform.

The fraud rate for SNAP in general is one of the lowest for a federal program that spends billions each year to help people. The SNAP fraud that is common in Ohio and that grabs the most headlines are merchants who take SNAP benefits for cash under the table.

When Yost's audit came out in 2016, Jessica Shahin, SNAP Associate Administrator, Food & Nutrition Service, USDA noted that there are tools available to all the states to flag issues like those pointed out in his audit but not all the states use them. Using a photo on the EBT card is something states are allowed to do now.

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In the end Yost told a Congressional committee, "*I do not believe that fraud is rampant in Ohio...*"

Twelve percent of Ohioans are helped through SNAP. 65% of them are families with children and 40% are elderly or disabled. 41% of people getting SNAP work. Changes to SNAP or any of the public assistance programs that is claimed to "strengthen the program" or "save money" will actually hurt the millions of Ohioans who need the help.

There is also plenty of evidence showing that dollars given to people through SNAP are returned to the economy helping out the grocery stores and mom and pop food markets. According to the USDA: "*SNAP serves as an automatic stabilizer for the economy. For example, during an economic downturn, when unemployment increases and wages fall, more individuals become eligible for SNAP and enroll in the program. As SNAP participants spend this increased Federal assistance, income is generated for those involved in producing, transporting, and marketing the food and other goods purchased by SNAP recipients. The impact of this increased spending by SNAP households "multiplies" throughout the economy as the businesses supplying the food and other goods—and their employees—have additional funds to make purchases of their own*".

Instead of attacking the poor with baseless and evidence free bills how about if we spend our time addressing the root causes of people needing the help like the pandemic affected economy. We need to seriously invest in our struggling areas like Toledo and the Appalachian foothills. What are you actually doing to reduce poverty in Ohio? Arbitrarily kicking people off SNAP or Medicaid isn't reducing poverty.

Instead of using the blunt force of a law to shame and attack poor people how about you root out real fraud and corruption in the state house including laws tainted by bribery?

There are many hard-working Ohioans who frankly are struggling to put food on the table for their families. We all can't be executive directors of a professional society but as an elected legislator you are expected to get out of your suburban bubbles and see that these struggling families need help, and we need to actually help them rather than make it harder to be poor. It also might help in writing future bills if it seems like you understand how public assistance actually works.

We ask you to vote NO on Senate Bill 17 as it is not needed and is based on a false and biased view that doesn't match the real world. The bill is just another attempt to shame and punish people who are already struggling. Enough is enough.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Berger', written in a cursive style.

Douglas Berger - President