



**American
Heart
Association.**

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SB 17 Opponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Minority Member Craig and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, the American Heart Association joins other anti-hunger and public health organizations in opposition to Senate Bill 17. This legislation comes during a global pandemic that has killed over 11,000 Americans since March 2020 and many more out of work or facing pay cuts, making the introduction of this legislation insensitive to those in need and does nothing to assist them. The goal should be to eliminate food insecurity, not increase it.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program, providing monthly benefits to more than 44 million people living in the U.S. and 1,383,000 in Ohio (#8 in the nation). SNAP provides assistance to millions of low-income individuals and families each year. In fact, more than 1 in 10 families in the United States rely on SNAP benefits each month.

The SNAP benefit formula takes into account a household's income and expenses, phases out benefits as earnings rise and includes a deduction for earned income to reflect the cost of work-related expenses and to encourage SNAP participants to work while they are receiving benefits.

SNAP is a vitally important program that protects children and families who struggle to afford food by reducing food insecurity. Nearly two-thirds of all SNAP participants are children, elderly, and people with disabilities. The AHA advocates that the state, instead of making the requirements to receive aid more stringent and restrictive, bolster the financial incentives to encourage SNAP participants to purchase more fruits and vegetables. Increased access to these incentivizing programs provides families with greater access to healthier foods and local economies will be stronger as a result. While SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded, the program is administered by state and county agencies, and administrative costs are shared between the states and federal government.

This legislation would create barriers for entry into this need-based program where fraud is not as rampant as advertised by the sponsor. In fact, Ohio's county agency investigators established that only 2,465 instances of SNAP fraud, totaling \$4,456,726, occurred. This amounts to merely .3% of the SNAP caseload and .2% of the SNAP dollars issued that year.

The AHA believes the requirements outlined in SB 17 do not further the goals of the Medicaid program. Instead, they compromise access to healthcare for a very vulnerable population at a time when Ohioans need access to care now more than ever. We urge you to focus instead on solutions that can promote adequate, affordable, and accessible Medicaid coverage for all Ohioans.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments on this important matter.