



Advocates for Ohio's Future

Senate Bill 17 Opponent Testimony
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
February 24, 2021

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 17. My name is Susan Jagers. I am the director of the Ohio Poverty Law Center and I am here today in my role as an Executive Committee member of Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF).

AOF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of over 500 state and local health and human services policy, advocacy, and provider organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so that all Ohioans live better lives. Our coalition believes in investing in our state's most valuable resource—our people—to ensure that they are safe, healthy, and can access pathways to prosperity for themselves and their families.

According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau [Household Pulse Survey](#), which ran through Feb. 1, an estimated 737,000 Ohioans sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat over the previous seven days, and 542,000 had little or no confidence in their ability to pay the next month's rent.

The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services reported 326,000 new and continuing jobless claims as of Jan. 30, 2021.

The last 11 months have tested our safety net programs like no other time. The job and income loss for many Ohioans happened suddenly and has lasted longer than anyone could have predicted. The recovery for those hit the hardest financially will be the slowest.

Fortunately, we had safety net programs. And although not perfect, they were a safety net for many. SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance kept millions of Ohioans fed, housed, and with access to health care. These safety-net programs were reinforced with rule and process flexibility and supplemented by non-traditional unemployment benefits, stimulus payments, and other targeted assistance for rent and utilities. Together, these resources kept your constituents from starving, homelessness, and further despair.

As a coalition of health and human services organizations, many of our members see daily how these programs have held families together and supported their most basic needs. Additionally, service providers like Ohio's network of foodbanks, are assisting struggling families at levels never seen before.

It is for these reasons we oppose the proposed changes in Senate Bill 17 and question the timing of such an effort. All people need safety and security, especially in the middle of a pandemic and a recession. Public

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programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance are the strongest lifelines to ensure our neighbors have the supports they need during these challenging times.

Unlike any issue we have worked on, more of our members and partners have raised concerns about the provisions of Senate Bill 17. In just a week, we had 87 organizations join a sign-on letter to this committee and Senate leadership in opposition.

Collectively, we are concerned about the attempt to cut holes in our already stretched safety-net that will harm low-income, unemployed, and sick Ohioans. Instead, this is the time to study these systems and assess what worked well and should continue and what needs to be strengthened so we are better prepared in the future. The recommendations should be based on the needs of Ohioans and the experience of consumers, program administrators, workers—not cookie-cutter proposals from out-of-state think tanks.

Additionally, we already know that safety net programs can be improved to better support working families by addressing the benefit cliff. The cliff is the sudden and often unexpected decrease in public benefits like SNAP that can occur with a small increase in income. The benefit cliff is a hurdle for families and businesses when wage increases result in a net loss of income for a family.

In the last two weeks, co-chairs Senator Bob Hackett and Representative Mark Fraizer held the first meeting of the Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council—established by the previous General Assembly—which will study the program and make recommendations for improvements. This process should play out before changes are made to the Unemployment Insurance system.

We have all been hearing about fraud in the unemployment compensation insurance system. As Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Director Kimberly Henderson shared in her testimony before the House Finance Committee, most of the reported fraud involves identity theft and is concentrated in the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program—which is a temporary federal program. In Ohio’s traditional unemployment insurance program, far more fraudulent claims have been flagged by the Department than paid.

AOF—with its depth and breadth of its membership and partners—stands ready to assist this committee and the General Assembly to make sure the safety net is strong for those who need it. This means securing robust public assistance policies and rejecting any rules and requirements that dilute the efficacy of programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment compensation.

Our children are counting on all of us to create the Ohio they deserve. We want to live in a state where we create opportunity, care for and invest in people, and focus on equitable recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 17. We urge you to oppose the bill and work towards policies that support the safety and security of Ohioans in times of crisis.

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Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee,

The leaders of Advocates for Ohio's Future and the undersigned organizations unite to voice our opposition to the proposed changes in eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and unemployment insurance included in Senate Bill 17.

All people need safety and security, especially in the middle of a pandemic and a recession. Public programs like SNAP, Medicaid and unemployment insurance are the strongest lifelines to ensure our neighbors have the supports they need during these challenging times.

SB 17 will hurt Ohio's recovery. It will worsen food security and health outcomes and prevent millions of federal dollars from flowing into Ohio communities. It punishes workers and creates more barriers for children, families, working adults and seniors to get the help they need.

During a time when 737,000 Ohioans didn't have enough to eat over a week's time, 1 in 5 Ohio kids are living in poverty and over 130,000 children are uninsured, leaders should be looking for ways to support their struggling neighbors rather than put up more barriers to assistance. If this body wants to help people earning low wages, the General Assembly should instead create a benefit-bridge so workers and families with low-incomes can gain greater stability.

Our children are counting on us to create the Ohio they deserve. We want to live in a state where we create opportunity—not barriers, care for and invest in people and focus on equitable recovery. This means securing robust public assistance policies and strongly rejecting any rules and requirements that, grounded in systemic racism, dilute the efficacy of programs like SNAP, Medicaid and unemployment compensation.

We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 17 and work towards policies that support the safety and security of Ohioans in times of crisis.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Ohio's Future

AOF Steering Committee Members

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
Coalition on Homelessness & Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)
Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development
Human Service Chamber of Franklin County
Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition - MHAC Ohio

AOF Endorsing Organizations

Groundwork Ohio
Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County
Hunger Network in Ohio
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
NOBLE

AOF Steering Committee Members cont.

Ohio Association of Community Health Centers
 Ohio Association of Foodbanks
 Ohio Poverty Law Center
 Policy Matters Ohio
 Public Children Services Association of Ohio
 The Center for Community Solutions
 UHCAN Ohio

American Heart Association
 Amherst Food Pantry
 Associate of Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, Ohio
 Attica Community Food Pantry
 Blessing Basket Food Pantry
 Breaking Bread Community Meals
 Buckeye Community Hope Foundation - Bellefontaine Manor
 Caracole, Inc.
 Caring Friends Food Pantry
 Christian Temple Disciples of Christ
 Circle of Friends
 Cleveland Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Steering Committee
 COAAA Advisory Council
 Coleman Behavioral Health-Kenton
 Contact Center
 Cuyahoga County Senior and Adult Services Advisory Board
 Divine Catering & Events LLC
 Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.
 Euclid Hunger Center
 Finance Fund Capital Corporation
 FISH of Tiffin
 Five Loaves Food Pantry
 Gathering Hope House
 Global Parenting Network
 Grace Community Dinner
 Greater Cleveland Food Bank
 Healthy Fathering Collaborative
 Impact Mt. Tabor
 Indian Lake Villa
 Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati
 Jefferson County ADAMHS Board
 KNAP Sack, Inc.
 Liberty Worship Center Helping Hands Pantry

AOF Endorsing Organizations cont.

United Way of Central Ohio
 United Way of Greater Toledo
 United Way of Summit and Medina
 Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
 Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio
 Miami Valley Community Action Partnership
 Mid-Ohio Food Collective
 Mt Zion UMC Rainbow Ministries
 New Hope Community Church Food Pantry
 Oberlin Community Services Council
 Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund
 Ohio CDC Association
 Ohio Education Association
 Ohio Olmstead Task Force
 Passages Connecting Fathers and Sons
 Pathways Enrichment Center
 Physicians Action Network
 Pioneer Christian Ministries
 Rainbow 1 ST. John's Lutheran Church
 Schubert Center for Child Studies, CWRU
 Second Harvest Food Bank CCL
 Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio
 Single Payer Action Network Ohio
 Southeast Ohio Foodbank and Regional Kitchen
 St. Patrick Helping Hands
 St. Frances X. Cabrini
 St. Vincent de Paul, St. Clare Conference
 St. Vincent de Paul, Voice of the Poor
 The Foodbank, Inc.
 The NRP Group LLC
 The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
 Thrive Property Solutions, LLC
 Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership
 Vine of Hope Community Center
 Vineyard Community Church
 West Ohio Food Bank
 WestCare Ohio, Inc., dba East End Community Services

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cc: Senate President Matt Huffman
President Pro Tempore Jay Hottinger
Majority Floor Leader Kirk Schuring
Majority Whip Rob McColley