



TESTIMONY OF:
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IN OPPOSITION TO:
Senate Bill 17
Benefits Eligibility
Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee
February 24, 2021

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Minority Member Craig, and distinguished members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to Senate Bill 17.

My name is Erin Ryan and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network (WPPN), a coalition of nearly 40 organizations that advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and families. We believe that the measure of success for our state and communities is largely determined by the success of Ohio's women. Therefore, policymakers must advance public policies centered in equity, fairness, and justice that address the following issue areas:

1. Promoting an economic security agenda for women;
2. Ensuring fairness and opportunity in the workplace; and
3. Improving women's health and well-being

These policy goals guide WPPN's work and shaped our interest in testifying today in opposition to Ohio's Senate Bill 17. This legislation would make damaging and unnecessary barriers to accessing crucial programs that provide safety and security for Ohioans, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and unemployment compensation. These cruel and far-reaching restrictions stand to harm Ohio women, children, and families who need and deserve security and safety during these unprecedented times. Moreover, the outcomes of the bill would have a disproportionate impact on Ohioans of color.

Every woman, regardless of their race, class, or zip code, deserves the ability to lead an economically secure, safe, and healthy life where they can thrive - particularly as we face a global pandemic and accompanying catastrophic economic crisis. This future is possible if our state leaders come together to enact proactive policy initiatives that provide direct relief for families facing hardships now, as well as rebuilding our broken systems that hold back women from their full potential. **Harmful legislation like Senate Bill 17 threatens to undermine the health, economic opportunity, and futures of Ohio women and their families, and it would put this goal out of reach for far too many Ohioans.**

1. Imposing work and education requirements for certain Medicaid recipients and creating additional stringent eligibility for Medicaid are harmful and ineffective barriers to healthcare that will result in the loss of coverage while failing to increase employment.

Medicaid has long been a lifeline for women, especially women in rural America. Work requirements would threaten their coverage and, as a result, harm their health. In Ohio, women compose more than half (55 percent) of the state's Medicaid population, and it disproportionately covers the poorest and sickest populations of women among all sources of insurance.¹ As a result of the systemic barriers to economic equality and structural racism, Black women make up a disproportionate share of Medicaid enrollees, and they would be uniquely affected by restrictions to the program.²

Women face unique barriers to employment and would be disproportionately affected by a work requirement. Women are more likely to hold low-wage, part-time and informal jobs, in part because they take on a disproportionate share of caregiving duties for children and other family members. The unpredictability and lack of stability of these jobs where women are underemployed mean that they are more likely to lose coverage with work requirements due to gaps in employment or inability to meet the number of hours required. During the pandemic, many women cut back hours at work or left the workforce entirely to take on caregiving duties for children, sick family members, or older adults. Underemployment and barriers to the workforce could make maintaining Medicaid coverage impossible for many women.

¹ The Ohio Department of Medicaid. Enrolled Population for month of December 2020.

<https://analytics.das.ohio.gov/t/ODMPUB/views/MedicaidDemographicandExpenditure/WhoWeServe?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y>. Accessed 2021, February 21

² Medicaid: Ensuring Basic Health Care for Millions of Women and Children” National Partnership for Women & Families, 2018, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/health-care/medicaid-ensuringbasic-health-care-for-millions-of-women-andchildren.pdf>

Work requirements have been shown to be unsuccessful in achieving a greater participation in the workforce or lifting participants out of poverty. Plain and simple, work requirements don't work. Research studies on work requirements for other safety net programs found a lack of effectiveness in actually helping people maintain long-term employment. These studies find that increases of employment are relatively small and tend to fade over time. The work requirements failed to make advances in reducing poverty among participants, and some even became poorer.³

Access to health care is essential to bolster the health, well-being, and economic security of women and their families. In Ohio, Medicaid is a key component of strong health outcomes for women. Additionally, the job loss, health problems, and economic insecurity brought on by COVID-19 has made the need for Medicaid more important than ever before. Hurdles to accessing this program would only harm the health and livelihoods of Ohioans.

2. Adding eligibility requirements and creating restrictive stipulations for electronic benefit transfer cards for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program creates unnecessary barriers to accessing food for families who are struggling.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a cornerstone program to combat hunger. It supports a diverse group of Ohioans who are facing economic hardship, serving as a bridge to help many Ohio women, children, and families access regular food. SNAP is a proven program that has been shown to free up money in a family's budget for additional necessities, promote better nutrition, and support stronger health and well-being. The program is particularly important for women: Nationally, over six in ten (61 percent) of SNAP households with children were headed by a single adult, 91 percent of which were headed by women.⁴

During the pandemic, women, particularly Black and Latina women have experienced disproportionately high rates of unemployment. The financial strain facing families, especially households where women were the sole, primary, or co-breadwinner, has increased the need for programs like SNAP. Additionally, with school closures, families with low-incomes may be facing new challenges to ensuring their children have regular access to meals. The changes proposed in Senate Bill 17 would create new hardships on

³ LaDonna Pavetti, Work Requirements don't cut poverty, evidence shows. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 7, 2016 <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/work-requirements-dont-cut-poverty-evidence-shows>

⁴ Jasmine Tucker et al., Nat'l Women's Law Ctr., By the Numbers: Data on Key Programs for the Well-Being of Women & Their Families 3 (Dec. 2019), <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/12/Bythenumbers2019-2.pdf>.

families facing food insecurity in utilizing the program, leading to more severe food insecurity.

3. Senate Bill 17's changes to eligibility for unemployment compensation hurts Ohioans who are facing economic hardship during the coronavirus pandemic.

The economic recession and rising rates of unemployment brought on by the pandemic has devastated many Ohioans' economic security and pushed many into economic distress. These ramifications of the pandemic have hit women the hardest, particularly women of color. This is especially true for Latina and Black women who make up a disproportionate share of the unemployed workforce due to their overrepresentation in industries like food service, retail, and hospitality where employers are forced to close entirely or eliminate jobs because of the pandemic.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the United States, 2.1 million women left the labor force in 2020, and over 5.2 million women's jobs were lost over the course of the year. While white women actually gained jobs in December, women of color, specifically Black and Latina women faced even higher rates of unemployment. In December alone, 154,000 Black women left the labor force altogether.⁵

Ohio's unemployment compensation program has provided much needed financial relief to women and families who are facing the loss of their job. Unfortunately, many people have also faced delays and complications in receiving their unemployment benefits. Imposing additional hoops for individuals to jump through in order to demonstrate their eligibility for the program would only serve to further disrupt the ability for families to sustain themselves throughout this crisis.

As we continue to face the health and economic fallout of the pandemic, Ohioans need state lawmakers to take bold action to address the devastation of this crisis and to rebuild an Ohio that works for us all. Senate Bill 17 would take our state in the opposition direction, further threatening the health, economic security, and futures of Ohio women and their families. **On behalf of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, I respectfully urge the committee to reject Senate Bill 17, and to halt progress on moving forward on this legislation through both the regular legislative process and the state budget process.**

⁵ Carrazana, Chabeli. (2021, January 08). *In 2020, women gained back less than half the jobs they lost at the worst of the pandemic.* <https://19thnews.org/2021/01/women-economy-job-loss-2020-december/>

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions by email at ryan@innovationohio.org.

Sincerely,
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