



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF SB 17

Ohio Senate
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Chairman Roegner and Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, I am Brandi Slaughter. I represent, one of the oldest state ecumenical councils in the country, The Ohio Council of Churches, as its Policy Director. The Ohio Council of Churches is a partnership of 17 Christian denominations in 23 different organizational configurations throughout the state of Ohio. With over a 100 years of service, the Ohio Council of Churches represents the largest and most diverse group of Christians in Ohio, encompassing 4,000 congregations and nearly two-million members. I would be in person today, except for I haven't received a COVID vaccination and having survived breast cancer just last year it's too much of a risk. Please accept this written testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 17.

One of our policy priorities at the council is economic justice. We recognize that there are systems and root causes that lead people to experience the oppression of poverty and food insecurity. Therefore we support solutions that reduce or eliminate poverty. We work to ensure that people living in poverty, especially communities of color, are not punished or exploited because of their economic status. We support policies that improve access to services and supports for people in poverty and remove barriers to economic opportunity for each person. SB 17 is an attack on the poor, runs counter to our priority and overall commitment to keep the commandments of the Lord.

It is written in Matthew 25:35-40 (NRSV) ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, ^[a] you did it to me.'

Government's role is to address income inequality and poverty. Public assistance programs: unemployment insurance, Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program known as Food Stamps, all help poor and temporarily hard-pressed households make ends meet. Knowing how important these programs are to support individuals and families and lift them up and out of poverty, the council simply can't support any measure that would lead to many Ohioans losing SNAP benefits, Medicaid, and unemployment benefits by increasing paperwork and the costs in

administering these programs and adding additional requirements, like work requirements on older Ohioans.

We reject:

- Photo ID's on SNAP cards: I have a 94 year old aunt, who I frequently run errands for. Perhaps you remember the snow storm we just encountered. With this requirement, how would I complete shopping on her behalf or any other person that I as clergy may attempt to support?
- Requirements of households to spend down assets before qualifying (selling the car, tap into any savings, etc. before qualifying for benefits). A life without savings is extremely stressful. Without savings, one is one financial emergency from the edge. This requirement goes against any advice of what is necessary to stabilize one's household. What happens when the car breaks down and you are without savings to have it fixed so that you can get back and forth to work. In the height of COVID, when many were temporarily without work, some relied on savings to keep shelter over their heads. The route out of poverty runs through savings, not consumption. Yet too many government policies are perversely designed in ways that discourage saving.
- Additional reporting: I would imagine this body would be in favor of less government interaction. It seems excessive that if a person works an extra 2 hours a week for a month (or receives a large tip, etc.), they have to send in new data on their income or be in violation and potentially lose benefits.

Red tape and administrative burdens are obstacles to providing access to and obtaining public services. These burdens can keep people who are eligible for public programs from receiving the help they need. I urge you to have compassion for the poor and reject Senate Bill 17. Thank you!