

Ohio House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee
March 16, 2023
Testimony by Lynn Williams, Contact Center, Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

As a staff member of Contact Center for twenty eight years and at age 63, over the years I have learned a lot about the impact of state government policies on low-income families. Before employment at Contact Center, I worked in Ohio's Head Start program and Cincinnati's largest homeless shelter as an advocate for homeless women, many of whom had been raped or survived domestic abuse. I encourage this Committee to include the following policies to H.B. 33 to boost health care and income security for Ohio families raising children and for pregnant women in our State.

First, I appreciate that Governor DeWine has proposed to provide Medicaid coverage for pregnant women and families with children up to 300% of Federal Poverty Level. To improve even more on health care policy, I encourage this Committee to include Medicaid coverage for children age six and younger regardless of income level. Each Ohio child deserves a healthy start in life.

Ohio's low-income families also need more income security to have safe and stable families. Instead of the proposed child tax deduction, that will not help families making less than \$26,500 per year, Ohio should adopt the Thriving Families Tax Credit that will provide meaningful tax refunds to low- and moderate income families raising children. Contact Center thanks Ohio Policy Matters for leading this research. It would be similar to the federal expanded Child Tax Credit of 2021. Families I am aware of in Cincinnati used the child tax credit refunds to pay household expenses such as rent, utilities, car repairs and clothing for their growing children. This also helped the business community because low-income families spend tax refunds for immediate needs.

I also encourage you to reexamine the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) policies in our state. This is the Ohio Works First program that provides cash benefits to unemployed or underemployed families in Ohio as well as to pregnant women. Ohio's TANF program currently requires adult pregnant women to wait until they are six months into pregnancy before being eligible for TANF cash benefits. However, other states such as Illinois, allow TANF benefits to help pregnant women who are income eligible as soon as they have medical documentation of pregnancy. In researching federal TANF policy, I found out that federal TANF policy does indeed allow this. I urge Ohio to adopt this policy for pregnant women to alleviate financial hardship and stress. In my opinion, an expectant mother needs to have peace of mind and well-being during her entire nine months of pregnancy.

Finally, Ohio's TANF benefits should be raised to lift families with children and pregnant women above 50% of Federal Poverty Level, where the level is currently, according to the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services. In addition, families should be allowed the full five years of financial assistance, continuous if needed, that federal TANF policy allows using federal funding. There needs to be a guaranteed safety net that keeps parents and their children together as families.