



**Advocates for Ohio's Future**

101 East Town Street, Suite 520

Columbus, OH 43215

614-221-4945 ext. 4

**[www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org)**

TESTIMONY

ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

SUB. HB 49

SENATE FINANCE – HEALTH AND MEDICAID SUBCOMMITTEE

**REBECCA KRELKO**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Tavares, and members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is a nonpartisan coalition of over 490 local and statewide organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so that all Ohioans live better lives.

Ohio should be a great place for all Ohioans to live and work. Before people are able to lift themselves up out of poverty through the use of training and education, they must be able to meet their basic needs. If they or their children are hungry, if they have no means of transportation, if they have untreated health issues, if they have an active opioid addiction, if they do not feel safe in their homes – those must be addressed so that people can leverage education and job skills to achieve self-sufficiency.

Human services play a key role in stabilizing individuals and families. Ohio's budget and public policy priorities can make Ohioans more competitive, create good jobs, increase opportunity for all Ohioans, and make Ohio's economy stronger. Targeted, smart investments in human services, including food assistance, health care, early education, behavioral health, long-term services and supports, housing and child welfare, promote and support a productive workforce.

**AOF has identified the following budget solutions for a safe, healthy and thriving Ohio:**

#### **EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)**

- Founded in 1975, the federal EITC is our nation's most effective anti-poverty program. The program has traditionally had bipartisan support and rewards work because only families with earned income can claim the credit. 939,000 Ohioans get the federal EITC, which delivers \$2.3 billion to Ohio's families and communities each year.
- Supporting a **20 percent refundable state EITC with no cap** would mean one-third of low-income Ohioans earning between \$21,000-\$39,000 would receive a credit, with an average savings of \$620. And 38 percent of the poorest Ohioans with incomes under \$21,000 would receive an average credit of about \$451 under the reformed EITC.

#### **SNAP EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING**

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) supports employment and training activities to increase self-sufficiency for SNAP participants.
- SNAP E&T can expand opportunities for low-income Ohioans to enhance their skills, credentials, careers, and ultimately, their families' financial well-being. By investing \$2 million per year to **increase capacity and expand the program to community colleges**, more participants will have the opportunity to be trained for skilled jobs that are in demand in their local labor markets.

#### **CHILD CARE**

- The largest categories for case closure in public child care are those due to job loss, as today's volatile job market often makes it difficult - if not impossible - for parents to find work within the allowed 30- to 90-day timeframe.
- By increasing access to affordable child care with **12-month continuous eligibility and initial eligibility set at 200 percent of the federal poverty level**, unforeseen changes in a parents'

employment status will not derail a child's access to high-quality child care. In addition, a parent's job search or education would not be hindered as a result of terminated child care.

### **ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

- We must work harder to **ensure that older Ohioans in every county are safe** from neglect, abuse and exploitation. Ohio's senior population continues to grow, and services need to keep pace with this growth. We have an opportunity to strengthen the Adult Protective Services (APS) system to ensure that older Ohioans are safe by committing the energy and resources needed now and in the future or we will see older Ohioans increasingly at risk.
- By increasing APS funding to at least \$10 million per fiscal year with a base allocation of \$65,000 per county and the remainder distributed by formula, every county would be able to employ a full-time staff person and support services to meet APS standards set forth in the 2016-17 biennial budget.

### **DISABILITY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

- Ohio's Disability Financial Assistance (DFA) Program provides monthly cash payments to individuals who are unemployable due to physical or mental impairment and ineligible for other public assistance programs funded at least in part with federal dollars. As of February 2017, 6,217 individuals a month were accessing the cash grant. Though the number of Ohioans granted assistance through DFA is small, **continued support is needed for Ohioans with disabilities** who are unable to work or otherwise ineligible for other public assistance programs to help maintain health and meet basic needs.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION**

- The purpose of unemployment insurance is to stabilize our economy and alleviate personal hardship stemming from involuntary job loss. Modernizing and ensuring that Ohio's Unemployment Compensation System is solvent and provides access to benefits for low-wage, part-time and contingent workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own will **ensure this critical poverty-prevention tool remains intact**. A solvency plan should take a balanced approach reached by consensus.

### **DIRECT SERVICE WORKFORCE**

- Ohioans often lose good, compassionate, hard-working employees because of poverty-level wages and challenging work environments. The direct service workforce is expected to grow more than any other sector in the next five years, outpacing retail, teachers and fast food workers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, direct care jobs are the #1 (personal care aides) and #3 (home health aides) jobs in demand, with almost 800,000 jobs to be filled by 2024. But turnover averages between 51 percent (developmental disabilities) and 61 percent (private duty home care) and wages in Ohio are below poverty. Staff shortages lead to inefficiencies and poor health outcomes. We support better outcomes of care, improved health of the general population and more efficient use of resources.
- A three-pronged approach is needed to **strengthen Ohio's direct service workforce**:

1. Increase wages for direct care workers. Achieve a sustainable average wage at 200 percent of FPL for the average family size in Ohio (with an average household size of 2.46, now \$15.62/hour).
2. System reform that shifts the focus from activities to outcomes with savings from efficiencies reinvested in the direct care workforce.
3. Improve worker satisfaction and lower turnover rates.

### **CHILDREN SERVICES**

- Ohio's children services system ensures our children and youth have a safe and permanent family to become healthy, educated and competitive adults. It provides services to protect children, nurture families and strengthen communities, but Ohio's children services system is in crisis due to the opiate epidemic. Children services agencies' ability to **provide essential services to Ohio's children – the silent victims of the opioid crisis** – is at risk.
- By increasing investment in Child Protective Services Allocation (SCPA) by \$30 million per fiscal year, county agencies can recruit additional foster and adoptive homes, provide additional support to kinship and foster families, address rising foster care placement costs, recruit and retain a via workforce, and leverage additional federal funding (for every \$1.00 invested in eligible foster care placement, the federal government provides a \$0.62 match).

### **INFANT MORTALITY**

- Support strategies identified through statewide and regional work, including community-based strategies, efforts to connect mothers with prenatal care and care coordination, reporting data to inform the state's work to reduce infant mortality, and utilizing toolkits developed through the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) for local communities to improve population health, specifically as it relates to maternal and infant health, to **reduce Ohio's high rate of infant mortality** that remains above the national average.

### **MEDICAID**

- By expanding Ohio's Medicaid Program, over 700,000 Ohioans gained access to affordable health care coverage. Good health is critical for maintain a job, earning an education, caring for children and parents, and participating in community life.
- Imposing work requirements or premiums would be a step backwards for Ohio, damaging progress made toward affordable **access to health care without barriers for low-income Ohioans**. Requiring premiums for childless adults between 100 and 138 percent of the federal poverty level would result in decreased access to needed services. Ohio's Medicaid program has a churn rate—when individuals enter and exit the Medicaid program—of about 15 percent, based on data most recently updated in January 2013.<sup>1</sup> Given the added component of paying a premium, this churn rate will likely increase, especially given the experiences of other states

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<sup>1</sup> Leighton Ku, PhD, MPH, and Erika Steinmetz, MBA, George Washington University. The Continuity of Medicaid Coverage: An Update, April 19, 2013.  
[http://www.communityplans.net/Portals/0/coverageyoucancounton/Continuity\\_of\\_Medicaid\\_Coverage\\_Update\\_4-2013.pdf](http://www.communityplans.net/Portals/0/coverageyoucancounton/Continuity_of_Medicaid_Coverage_Update_4-2013.pdf)

that have implemented premiums. Continuity of coverage is vital for those with chronic illnesses, including behavioral health disorders, to remain healthy enough to work.

### **LONG TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS**

- Preserve the existing role of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in Medicaid waivers by **maintaining the current care coordination and cost effective home and community based services** under the PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and Ohio Home Care waivers. AAAs are embedded in our communities and leverage many different resources to provide a holistic approach. PASSPORT is one of the key resources integrated into the AAAs' delivery system. From 1995 to 2011, as a result of PASSPORT the use of Medicaid-funded nursing homes by Ohioans age 60 and older dropped by 14.5 percent despite a 15 percent increase in the aging population. The rate of people receiving nursing facility care compared to in home care decreased from more than 90 percent in 1992 to 52 percent in 2013.

### **SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT**

- The Senior Community Services Block Grant funds services that enable older adults to remain living in their homes for as long as possible, rather than a more expensive alternative such as a nursing facility. This source of funding provides a diverse array of services for adults 60 and older, including home delivered and congregate meals, transportation, personal care, respite, and caregiver supports. As the senior population continues to grow, this is an increasingly vital resource. By 2030, adults 65 years and older will make up nearly 25% of Ohio's population, up from 14% today.
- Enable AAAs to **serve more Ohioans at home and in the community** by restoring the Senior Community Services Block Grant to \$15 million per fiscal year and setting aside an additional \$150,000 per fiscal year for Scripps Gerontology Center to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of non-Medicaid interventions through the block grant along with improved health outcomes and subsequent Medicaid savings.

### **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

- **Safeguard behavioral health service access and capacity**, rebuild system infrastructure, and address workforce challenges by maintaining funding for programs and services to support a public health response to the increasing rates of suicide and overdose deaths through the HOPES initiative totaling \$170 million over the biennium. The Medicaid behavioral health redesign initiative, if reasonably implemented, will add new and needed services, but it does not address workforce issues. The biggest challenge facing the behavioral health response is overcoming decades of underfinancing coupled with severe shortages of highly skilled and licensed professionals.

### **MULTI-SYSTEM YOUTH**

- Multi-System Youth refers to a child or young person with a significant mental or emotional disorder, addiction, and/or developmental delay who is involved or at risk of being involved with two or more of the following systems, including child protection, developmental disabilities, juvenile justice, and mental health and addiction services. **Reduce the need for parents to relinquish custody to children services** to access treatment for their children by implementing

recommendations made by the Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth. These youth and their families were directly involved in the development of the recommendations and we urge resources that will:

1. Establish a state-level youth and family crisis stabilization fund to prevent custody relinquishment and address the needs of youth and families in crisis and unable to access appropriate levels of care.
2. Establish a unified strategy for data collection and sharing across child servicing systems to identify resource utilization, service unitization patterns and gaps, and monitor outcomes.

### **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

- **Increase positive outcomes for youth, families and communities** through Ohio's juvenile justice system by allocating \$1 million to the Ohio Supreme Court to implement a statewide data collection system. The Department of Youth Services has led Ohio's remarkable juvenile justice reforms, including innovative initiatives such as RECLAIM and Targeted RECLAIM, that have dramatically increased the number of youth being safely managed and accessing services in local communities. Each year approximately 92,000 children are involved with juvenile courts across the state. Yet, we are limited in our ability to describe the comprehensive picture of juvenile justice involved youth, service utilization or outcomes due to the absence of a standard, statewide data system.

### **HUNGER RELIEF**

- Hunger is a complex problem in Ohio impacting 1 in 6 Ohioans, and it requires a comprehensive solution, including government funding, private and corporate donations, community and faith-based partnerships, and access to federal nutrition programs and other programs for low-income individuals and their families. Access to food can stabilize struggling families, support Ohio workers, and stimulate Ohio's economy.
- **Increase access to affordable, healthy food for low-income Ohioans** by increasing funding through *A Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief* in support of critical hunger relief programs, including the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program, to \$30 million per fiscal year.

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

- Housing is by far the most expensive item in the family budget and is simply out of reach for many Ohioans. Nearly one in three Ohio households are "housing cost burdened", overcrowded, or living in functionally substandard housing. The Ohio Housing Trust Fund helps make home a reality for hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who need it most by supporting services for the homeless, affordable housing development, home repair, and accessibility modifications while boosting the economy and helping to revitalize local communities.
- Maintaining increased investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund to **support critically important housing projects and programs** will help meet not only Ohio's housing needs, but also address other problems, including health, education, child welfare, and the economy.

## TRANSPORTATION

- Transportation is vital for people to get to work, grocery stores, medical appointments, child care, school, and participate in the economy. With transportation at the heart of many barriers Ohioans face in their daily lives, Ohio needs a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system made up not only of roads and highways, but also a network of transportation options, including public transit, passenger and freight rail, streetcars, hybrid buses, electric vehicles, and walk-able, bike-able streets.
- **Increase access to accessible, affordable public transit and transit alternatives** for all Ohioans by boosting use of federal flex funds to \$50 million per fiscal year as recommended by the Ohio Department of Transportation's *Transit Needs Study* and General Revenue Funds to \$25 million per fiscal year to help local public transit draw down federal funds and creating a sustainable replacement for lost revenues.

Each of these issues must receive series attention from the Senate during 2018-19 state budget negotiations. Working together, we can support thriving communities by ensuring that that all Ohioans are safe, have good jobs and can afford the basics.

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For more information about Advocates for Ohio's Future, its members and the budget solutions it promotes, visit [www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org).