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Ohio Senate Must Bolster State Budget to Support Thriving Communities

COLUMBUS – After reviewing the House's version of the 2018-19 biennial state budget bill, Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) is grateful to the House for supporting several of our priorities. However, we implore the Senate to use this budget adoption opportunity to increase investment in programs and supports that strengthen families, communities and our economy.

AOF sees opportunities for the Ohio Senate to support thriving communities by ensuring people are safe, have good jobs and can afford the basics. When families can pay for the basics, that spending strengthens the economy and supports local business. When Ohioans can't afford the basics, the economy slows down and harms the local community, including businesses and Ohioans at all income levels who call it home.

AOF is grateful for the House's support in the following areas:

- **Recognizing and responding to Ohio's opiate crisis.** House leadership increased funding for county public children services agencies by \$15 million per fiscal year. With increased state funding for county children services for the first time in over a decade, agencies will be better equipped to serve children impacted by the epidemic. AOF is also pleased that the House appropriated \$10 million per year in TANF funds for child care for kinship care providers.
- **Increasing investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund** to support critically important housing projects and programs for low-income Ohioans. The OHTF has a proven history of success and is the primary source of state funding to fight homelessness and expand access to safe, affordable housing.
- **Maintaining coverage for the Medicaid expansion population.** We support the House's decision not to freeze enrollment in Ohio's Medicaid expansion. AOF requests that language imposing work requirements for expansion enrollees will be removed to ensure Ohioans looking for a job do not lose coverage and access to primary, preventative care, which is a lower cost to the state, is not blocked or interrupted. AOF will continue to monitor the issue.
- **Retaining current quality care coordination and cost effective home and community based services** for Ohio seniors. The House delayed moving long term services and supports into a separate managed care program until 2021 and requires the creation of a workgroup to study MyCare Ohio and make recommendations about how changes can be efficiently and effectively implemented.
- **Safeguarding behavioral health services and capacity**, rebuilding system infrastructure and addressing workforce challenges. House leadership allocated funding for programs and services to support a public health response to increasing rates of suicide and opiate deaths through the HOPES initiative totaling \$170 million over the biennium. The House also delayed the behavioral health proposed coding/rate changes and the transition to managed care until January 1, 2018 and July 1, 2018, respectively.
- **Helping low-income Ohioans connect to education and skills** to be competitive in the new economy. The House invested \$2 million per year in SNAP Education and Training to increase capacity and expand the program to community colleges giving more SNAP participants the opportunity to be trained for skilled, locally in demand jobs.

AOF implores the Senate to invest in the following areas:

- **Investing in programs that support working Ohioans and their families.** Unfortunately, a job does not always mean a living. Ohio needs to increase access to affordable child care with 12-month continuous eligibility and initial eligibility set at 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In today's volatile job market, the ability to access child care is vital for parents to maintain employment and move up the economic ladder. AOF also supports making the twenty percent state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable with no cap.
- **Ensuring that older adults in every county are safe.** Ohio's population is aging. By 2030, adults age 65 and over will make up nearly 25 percent of the population, up from 14 percent today. While the House did increase funding for Adult Protective Services by \$250,000 per year, additional funding is needed to ensure that Ohio seniors in all counties are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation. AOF supports the allocation of \$10 million per year, so that every county can employ a full-time staff and support services to meet the standards set forth in the 2016-17 biennial budget.
- **Enabling Area Agencies on Aging to serve more Ohioans at home and in the community.** AOF supports restoring the 1.5 percent House cuts and an additional \$8 million per year for the Senior Community Services Block Grant.
- **Supporting Ohioans with disabilities.** The House's proposal includes the phase out of Ohio's Disability Financial Assistance Program, which provides a modest monthly cash benefit for low-income Ohioans with disabilities who do not meet all eligibility for other federal or state programs. 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.
- **Increasing access to affordable, healthy food** for low-income Ohioans. The House reduced funding for the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program for the first time in more than two decades by \$1 million over the biennium. AOF supports the Ohio Association of Foodbanks' request to restore the \$1 million in House cuts and providing an additional \$5 million per year for critical hunger relief.
- **Implementing a statewide data collection system for Ohio's juvenile courts.** AOF supports an allocation of \$1 million from the Ohio Courts Technology Initiative to implement a statewide data collection system to increase positive outcomes for youth, families and communities.
- **Reducing the need for families to relinquish custody to children services** to access treatment for their children. AOF supports implementing recommendations made by the Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth.
- **Making access to public transportation available to all Ohioans.** Ohio's under-investments in public transit limits low-income worker's ability to reach a diversity of jobs with sustainable wages and leaves too many people with disabilities and those who are aging essentially homebound. The House earmarked \$15 million a year, which is a move in the right direction, but more progress is needed. AOF supports boosting the use of federal flex funds to \$50 million and General Revenue Funds to \$25 million per fiscal year and creating a sustainable replacement for lost revenues.
- **Strengthening Ohio's direct service workforce** in support of better outcomes of care, improved health of the general population, more efficient use of resources, and a sustainable wage for direct service workers. AOF supports removing the language included in the House budget that prohibits proposed provider rate increases for personal care aides and assisted living waiver rates over the biennium. AOF also supports the House's removal of the language prohibiting provider rate increase for the developmental disabilities system.

Each of these issues must receive serious attention from the Senate during their 2018-19 state budget negotiations.