



HB 153: Time for the Senate to Act on the Budget

Any new revenue identified during the budget process must be prioritized for health, human service, and early care & education programs. Ohioans have enjoyed tax cuts since 2005. The “rainy day” is upon us. If revenue projections increase, then those additional funds must be used to improve vital services for Ohio’s most vulnerable.

- 1) **A safety net already in shreds from four years of state budget cuts cannot begin to handle today’s rising demand for services.** The recession has increased the need for basic health and human services at a time when government has fewer resources to provide such services. Long lines at food pantries, steep cuts to public services across the board, waiting lists for care – all point to a need for shoring up Ohio’s safety net. Recent reports* on the number of Ohioans living below the level of self-sufficiency reveal a state where too many children, families, seniors, and people with disabilities are vulnerable. Rising food and fuel costs are exacerbating an already urgent problem where one in six of our neighbors is hungry. If we judge a society by how its most vulnerable are treated, then most of Ohio’s 88 counties fail the test: 70 have more than one-quarter of their population living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, also known as the self-sufficiency level, making them eligible for emergency food assistance and other safety-net services; 26 of those counties have more than 35% of their population eligible. While Ohioans debate the best way to create jobs, poverty and want are growing - moreso among working Ohioans than among the unemployed. We must not leave our vulnerable neighbors behind.
- 2) **A “Jobs Budget” that reduces unemployment is only part of the answer.** The Great Recession has caused the face of poverty to change over the last three and a half years. In fact, many of our neighbors standing in food pantry lines, signing up their children for Medicaid, and relying on other public assistance programs are already working full-time. This budget must offer those working poor who are suffering because of wage stagnation, underemployment, and low-paying jobs a lifeline. They need relief from hunger, homelessness, mental illness, addiction, and other issues so that they can remain self-sufficient until the economy recovers. If we fail to invest in services that ensure an educated, healthy workforce, these Ohioans will be poorly positioned for when prosperity returns. Along with new jobs, this budget should prioritize workforce supports for those who, despite working hard every day, still fail to provide adequate food, health care, and security for themselves and their families.

- 3) **Adequate investment must support proposed reforms if they are going to be successful.** Bold policy reforms to shift services for seniors, people with disabilities, and those requiring behavioral health services away from expensive institutions and into less expensive home- and community-based settings will fall flat if not adequately funded. When those with mental illness and addiction do not receive the help they need in their community, they end up in hospitals, psychiatric wards, and prisons. If seniors and people with disabilities do not receive the services they need to remain independent, they end up in costly nursing facilities. If the budget is to be successful in saving money in the long term by spending less on institutionalized care, then significantly more investments must be made now in the community behavioral health and waiver systems.

* See [The State of Poverty in Ohio: A Path to Recovery](#) (Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and Community Research Partners), [Ohio Poverty Report](#) (Ohio Department of Development), and [2010 Ohio Family Health Survey Key Findings](#) (Government Resource Center).