



Advocates for Ohio's Future
37 West Broad Street, Suite 1100
Columbus, OH 43215
614-602-2463 | 614-721-1761
www.advocatesforohio.org

PRESS RELEASE
June 12, 2015

CONTACT
Bill Sundermeyer, 614-721-1761
Mark Davis, 513-218-5991
Col Owens, 513-300-3042

Not Too Late for Ohio Senate to Do the Right Thing

COLUMBUS – There is still time for the Ohio Senate to do the right thing by adopting a budget bill that ensures that all Ohioans are safe, have good jobs and can afford the basics. Thirty-four percent of Ohio households have incomes below the self-sufficiency standard. Only with their basic needs met can Ohioans fully participate in Ohio's economic recovery and begin to climb the ladder up and out of poverty. AOF implores the Ohio legislature to prioritize the available state resources to further strengthen Ohio's families and communities.

After reviewing the Senate's version of the 2016-17 biannual state budget bill, AOF is grateful to the Senate for taking action on several of our priorities, including increasing funding to combat hunger, restoring health care coverage for low-income pregnant women and women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer and developing oversight and revised timelines for the implementation of behavioral health system reforms. However, we remain deeply concerned about drastic cuts to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, reduction in funding for direct care wages and areas where investment is needed to support Ohio's working families, the child welfare system, and Adult Protective Services.

AOF supports the Senate's budget action in the following areas:

- **Recognizing and responding to Ohio's growing hunger crisis.** Senate leadership increased funding for the Ohio Foodbanks by \$2.5 million per fiscal year in addition to the \$2.75 million per fiscal year contributed in the House version of the bill, bringing the total to \$19.75 million per fiscal year. The Senate bill would make TANF the source of \$17.25 million per fiscal year of those dollars, a proposal which AOF will monitor in the coming weeks.
- **Retaining current Medicaid eligibility levels and restoring coverage** for pregnant women and women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer between 138 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level. We support the Senate's decision to remove language introducing premiums, HSAs and other barriers to health care access for low-income Ohioans. AOF hopes that health care coverage will also be restored for the same population through Family Planning Services, which helps ensure that families can safely plan their pregnancies to finish their education, advance in the workforce and move out of poverty.
- **Development of language that provides oversight, accountability and timelines for implementation of behavioral health system reforms** to help safeguard behavioral health services access and capacity, rebuild system infrastructure and address workforce challenges. The Senate version of the bill moves the transition into managed care from January 1, 2017 to January 1, 2018 and proposes regular monitoring of behavioral health services through the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC). AOF will continue to monitor this issue.
- **Restoration of Administration's proposal to create person-centered intensive case management work preparation services and supports** to prepare Ohioans to acquire and maintain jobs so they can support themselves and their families. Details of the case

management program are sparse; AOF will continue to monitor this issue as the details of the case management program are developed.

AOF is deeply concerned about changes made in the following areas:

- **Cut funding for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) by 50 percent.** The Senate removed half of the funding for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund to create 88 county bureaucracies, each taking an administrative fee that would further reduce scarce housing resources. Currently OHTF administrative costs are limited to five percent. The Ohio Housing Trust Fund has a proven history of success, leveraging public and private dollars at a rate of 9:1. AOF supports maintaining the OHTF in its current operating framework.
- **Expecting children services agencies to do more with less.** Ohio's child protection system has lost \$53.5 million in state dollars since 2009 and stands to lose \$17 million more over the next two years with the acceleration of the phase out of the Tangible Personal Property Tax. AOF supports an additional allocation of \$20 million per fiscal year to fund improved permanency outcomes for children in Ohio's child welfare system. AOF supports the Senate's creation of the Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth to develop recommendations to meet the needs of children served in multiple systems.
- **Reducing the pay rate for Ohio's direct service workforce.** The Senate's proposal reduces the ten percent rate increase for home health care workers introduced in the House to a five percent increase and reduces funding for direct care wage increases in developmental disabilities. Without a sustainable wage, outcomes of care and the health of the general population will be negatively affected. To achieve a sustainable, high quality direct care workforce the following outcomes are needed: 1) increased wages for direct care workers to \$15 per hour, 2) system reform that shifts the focus from activities to outcomes and 3) improve worker satisfaction resulting in lower turnover rates.

AOF is awaiting Senate leadership on the following:

- **Ensuring the safety of older Ohioans in every county.** AOF supports the allocation of \$20 million per fiscal year for Adult Protective Services to ensure that older adults in all counties are safe from neglect, abuse and exploitation. AOF also supports the request for an increase in the Senior Community Block Grant to provide more meals to more seniors. Senior nutrition programs can save the state in costly Medicaid health care and nursing home costs and provide an important support network to fight elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- **Investments in programs that support working families.** Unfortunately, a job does not always mean a living. Ohio needs to raise the eligibility of child care over the next four years, starting with a raise to 144 percent of the federal poverty level in 2016. The ability to access child care assistance is critical for parents working in low-wage jobs to maintain employment and move up the economic ladder. Ohio should also ensure stable learning environments for children by establishing twelve-month continuous eligibility for child care. AOF also supports making the ten percent state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable.

Each of these issues must receive serious attention from the Senate before final action on the 2016-17 state budget. It is never too late to do the right thing.