



Advocates for Ohio's Future

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Press Release

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Advocates for Ohio's Future Calls on Senate to do More for Ohio's Most Vulnerable

Columbus - Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) acknowledges that Governor DeWine and the Ohio House of Representatives made significant and needed investments to support Ohioans living in poverty or dealing with mental health issues and substance use disorders. Investing in Ohio builds a better future.

"We were encouraged by the reports we heard in Senate Finance earlier this week, where the leadership of the Health and Medicaid Subcommittee highlighted additional investments and policies that build upon the work the Governor and the House have done. We fully support their inclusion of additional dollars for foodbanks, additional investments in Adult Protective Services, increasing publicly funded childcare eligibility to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, implementing a coordinated, multi-agency approach to addressing infant and maternal health and committing to address issues concerning multi-system youth and preventing custody relinquishment," said Tara Britton, Co-Chair of AOF.

"However, news from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics shows in 2018, six of Ohio's 10 most common jobs paid wages so low that a family of three would need to use food assistance to make ends meet signifies any recent growth of the economy is likely attributed to increasing low wage jobs that do not support the basic needs of individuals, much less support a family," said Steve Wagner, Co-Chair of AOF. "Though we are heartened by the attention paid to these issues, the basic needs and support systems of children and families have been ignored for too long, and our most vulnerable have fallen further away from the quality of life we would expect in a state as prosperous as Ohio. We must follow through on the Governor's commitment to help those who have been left behind."

AOF recommends the Senate include the following policies in the operating budget to truly improve the lives of children and families now, and for generations to come:

Make the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Refundable: Ohio's nonrefundable EITC does very little to help Ohio's lowest income workers. The Transportation Budget removed the income cap and tripled the amount of the credit from 10% - 30%, but tax modeling from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy shows it will only help an additional 1% of Ohio's poorest families.

Only refundability helps the lowest wage workers. Most do not pay income tax, but do pay a larger portion of their income in state and local sales taxes than higher income workers. The EITC balances that tax inequality and helps these families take care of their basic needs and stay on the job by using their refund to make car repairs, pay child care costs, and buy food.

Increase the Ohio Works First benefit level: The number of Ohioans receiving OWF has declined to just under 94,000 people statewide. Nearly 90 percent are children. Many of these children are living with grandparents or other family members, some as a result of the opioid epidemic. For many families receiving OWF, it is their only source of income.

Declining caseloads over time mean that Ohio's TANF moneys are not being fully utilized to support poor families resulting in a surplus each fiscal year. OWF payments only increase by a small cost of living adjustment each year that provides little more than a few additional dollars each month. For these reasons, we are asking that at least 50 percent of TANF moneys that remain at the end of each fiscal year be used to increase the cash assistance provided to recipients of benefits under the OWF program in the following fiscal year.

Increase investment in SNAP Education and Training (E&T): Most able-bodied adults receiving SNAP (food stamp) benefits are subject to an Employment and Training (E&T) requirement. The availability and quality of these programs varies greatly across the counties. Given pending state legislation and a federal rule that will subject many more Ohioans to education and training requirements, it is imperative to ensure that adequate capacity and quality job training and support services exist for all Ohioans across the state.

The federal government currently provides an opportunity for the state and any provider of E&T programming to receive a 50 percent reimbursement from the federal government. This is called the SNAP E&T 50/50 program. The money is uncapped, and any drawn-down funds can be reinvested and submitted again for reimbursement. In Ohio,

existing non-profits, workforce development agencies, community colleges and other entities provide these services and could benefit from the 50 percent reimbursement.

Unfortunately, these entities are not taking advantage of this opportunity because Ohio has not fully incorporated SNAP E&T 50/50 into the state or county plans and does not have the infrastructure established to administer these federal funds. As a result, many SNAP recipients across the state have faced a shortage of meaningful, quality training programs and other essential supports needed to secure and retain a living-wage job.

In order to fully utilize available federal dollars to expand access and capacity for quality E&T programs, we urge the Senate to invest \$4 million in GRF per year to spur development of SNAP 50-50 eligible training initiatives and provide support to the state and county JFS agencies to build and coordinate the administrative infrastructure needed to manage the program. This investment will give older or struggling workers a second chance to develop the skills they need in the new economy.

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Advocates for Ohio's Future is a nonpartisan coalition of nearly 500 local and statewide organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so all Ohioans live better lives.