



Advocates for Ohio's Future

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GOVERNOR'S BUDGET STRENGTHENS SAFETY NET IN SOME AREAS, WEAKENS IT IN OTHERS

COLUMBUS - A statewide coalition of health, human service, and early care & education groups today applauded many facets of Governor John Kasich's executive budget that protect low-income Ohioans and those struggling with the recession. But Advocates for Ohio's Future cautioned that cuts in other key areas will take their toll on the state's most vulnerable populations.

Gayle Channing Tenenbaum, co-chair of Advocates for Ohio's Future, expressed relief that cuts to close the \$8 billion budget shortfall do not seem at this time to fall heaviest on the state's poor and vulnerable. "We are grateful that the Governor - and the legislature, too - acknowledges that health and human services have disproportionately borne the brunt of cuts in the last two budget cycles," Tenenbaum said. "By preserving Medicaid services - including vision and dental - the Governor is ensuring that a health-care safety net will be in place for Medicaid-eligible Ohioans."

Tenenbaum went on to express concerns over elimination of funding for community-based health centers. "Ohio's health centers serve half a million Ohioans each year," she said. "These clinics fill a critical gap in care, serving those who don't have health insurance but don't qualify for Medicaid either. Health centers meet their needs in a cost-effective, patient-directed way, saving money by preventing this population's use of costly hospital emergency rooms."

AOF co-chair Margaret Hulbert of United Way of Greater Cincinnati commended the Governor's focus on prenatal care as a common-sense method of promoting healthier children and mothers, as well as saving money in the system. "Lowering the number of low-birth-weight babies - whose care costs six times more than that of healthy babies - will have positive effects down the line, reducing the need for early intervention, special education in school, and more," Hulbert said.

Shifting the balance in long-term care from nursing institutions to home- and community-based services has been a policy priority for Advocates for Ohio's Future for eight years. "We are gratified that Ohio will finally start catching up with the rest of the country by providing older, frail, and disabled Ohioans with the opportunity to receive services in their own homes, where they would much rather be, instead of in costly nursing home settings," Hulbert said. "By expanding the cost-effective

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PASSPORT and Home Choice programs that keep people who don't need high-cost institutional care out of nursing homes, the state saves \$3,333 per person per month.”

Tenenbaum pointed to proposed cuts to child welfare and adoption services, including elimination of the cost-effective Kinship Permanency Incentive Program that places children with grandparents and other relatives with better outcomes than placement in group or foster care. “Abused and neglected children must remain a priority at the state level,” she said, “or else responsibility will be pushed down to local levies, which set up inequitable and inconsistent support depending on the wealth of the county and the willingness of voters to pass property tax increases.”

Preservation of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, key youth services programs, and emergency food assistance represents more good news in the budget. Advocates for Ohio's Future is continuing to examine proposed changes in mental health, addiction services, developmental disabilities, and the local government fund to determine how they affect the larger human service system.

In the coming days and weeks, AOF will offer its supporters (who can sign up at www.advocatesforohio.org) additional details and opportunities to influence their elected officials. “The long and anxious wait is over for the first step in this complex process,” Hulbert said. “Now we have a blueprint, and it's up to the legislature, with input from their constituents over the next hundred days, to approve a budget that strengthens our communities and offers better lives for Ohioans.”

“Ohio's safety net is complex and the services interrelated,” Tenenbaum said. “Just as parts of the Governor's budget will have positive impacts, some of the proposed cuts can have unintended consequences in other areas, and on Ohio's economy and workforce as a whole.

“We recognize that the Governor has thought hard about how to protect low-income Ohioans,” Tenenbaum concluded. “We look forward to working with him and the legislature to ensure that critical services are not lost.”

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Advocates for Ohio's Future works to maintain vital public services - health, human services, and early care & education - at a level that meets people's basic needs and protects our state's most vulnerable populations.