



## Advocates for Ohio's Future

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## ADVOCACY GROUP CELEBRATES VALUE OF VITAL PUBLIC SERVICES

*State budget must protect most vulnerable, help people back on their feet  
- and back to work*

COLUMBUS - An eight-year-old advocacy coalition with a new name is urging the Governor and state lawmakers trying to close the budget gap to keep in mind Ohio's most vulnerable and those struggling because of the recession.

Advocates for Ohio's Future suggests that significant savings in the state's Medicaid and human service budget can be achieved through transformational changes to the system, early assessment, timely intervention, flexibility, and streamlining. According to co-chair Gayle Channing Tenenbaum, the services provided by the state to poor and at-risk children and families, seniors, people with disabilities, the hungry and homeless, and those needing physical and behavioral health care form a critical safety net for Ohioans; moreover, they support the workforce and those looking for work.

"We can only improve on what's already working so that Ohio's human service delivery system can become even more streamlined, efficient, and cost effective," Tenenbaum said. "Responsible reforms to the state budget - including shifting costs in long-term care to provide the right amount of care where people live, in their homes - will help maximize taxpayers' investment in a system that is prevention oriented and responsive to people's needs."

Tenenbaum cited increasing poverty rates and unemployment as evidence that vital health and human services are more important than ever to getting ordinary Ohioans back on their feet - and back to work. Such services - from subsidized child care to PASSPORT - have always formed a safety net for people at different stages of their lives, but the need has skyrocketed as more middle-class people slide into poverty because of the recession.

Advocates for Ohio's Future was established in 2003 as the Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future. Rebranded this year to reflect its long-term commitment to elevating the value of vital public services, the coalition is led by representatives from more than 20 statewide and regional health, human service, and early care & education organizations. More than 100 organizations have endorsed AOF's mission - a number that grows every week.

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Organizations willing to endorse Advocates for Ohio's Future and individuals wishing to sign up to receive budget updates may do so at [www.advocatesforohio.org](http://www.advocatesforohio.org).

"We all know that in this recession the needs of families have grown immensely while private charities are seeing their own resources shrink," said co-chair Margaret Hulbert of United Way of Greater Cincinnati. "State government is the largest provider of services for vulnerable individuals and families. Investing in people is key to the well-being of our communities and our state. We cannot afford to disinvest in Ohio's most vulnerable."

Tenenbaum and Hulbert pointed to a number of cost-saving opportunities as examples of how vulnerable populations can be better served while conserving scarce state tax dollars:

- As much as \$750 million can be saved over the next three years by shifting the balance of consumers served in nursing facilities in Ohio from 58 to 50 percent. The state saves \$3,333 per person per month for every individual receiving home and community services instead of nursing facility services.
- Requiring greater openness in Medicaid cost structures and reimbursement rates can lead to redesigning and modernizing these payment policies with a focus on improving quality outcomes and reducing unnecessary expenditures.
- Early assessment and intervention in behavioral health care - mental illness and addiction - reduces lost productivity at work, costly hospital and prison stays, and costs in special education.
- The return on investment for high-quality early childhood education can be as high as \$7 to \$17 for every \$1 invested.
- Investing in safety-net programs that provide food and shelter can reap a return since these programs support many working families. Every dollar spent on such programs can yield anywhere from \$3 to \$10.

Pointing to polling results, Tenenbaum concluded, "Voters support a budget solution that maintains these critical services at a level that meets people's needs. Advocates for Ohio's Future shares the concerns about vulnerable Ohioans that Governor Kasich mentioned in his inaugural address yesterday, and we stand ready to work with the Governor and the Ohio General Assembly to preserve Ohio's safety net."

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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.*