



## A budget for everyone Fiscal Years 2022-23

### Ensure basic human dignity for all

Some of our most important social services are funded primarily with local dollars, with very little state assistance. The state budget provides little support for victims of domestic violence, so whether they can find shelter or not may depend on what county they live in and residents' ability to support property tax levies. In some communities, residents don't have enough money to fund children's protective services, which are stretched thin across the state. Kinship care is an increasing necessity in the pandemic and drug epidemic, but the state provides far too little aid for families who take in the children of kin. The pandemic has ravaged seniors living in nursing homes yet policymakers have allowed funding to meet the needs of seniors aging in the community to fall to insufficient levels. The state needs to do a far better job of providing compassionate social services to make sure Ohioans have refuge, protection and safety.

#### Increase safe, affordable housing options

**Recommendation:** More support for Ohio Housing Trust Fund

**Agency:** Ohio Development Services Agency

*Line item 195638, fund 6460*

The Minority Health Strike Force emphasized the need for more safe, decent and affordable housing. In 2018, Ohio had 44 affordable rental units available for every 100 households with extremely low incomes.<sup>1</sup> The Housing Trust Fund supports the development of affordable housing across the state; it has remained flat-funded since it was created in 2003. Annual revenue usually lags behind the original \$50 million/year goal and falls short of addressing the need for housing assistance in Ohio. The number of homeless households Trust Fund dollars helped decreased 23% between FY 2013 and FY 2018, even as homelessness grew. The number of affordable housing development and rehabilitation projects supported by Trust Fund dollars dropped from 42 projects in the 2011-12 program year to only 23 in 2016-17.<sup>2</sup> Additional resources are needed in the new budget to shelter people experiencing homelessness and to help repair the homes of seniors with low incomes and people with disabilities, allowing them to stay in their homes.

## Reduce domestic violence

**Recommendation:** \$7.7 million additional dollars

**Agency:** Office of the Attorney General

*Line item: 055504*

Evidence is emerging that family violence is rising with the stress and isolation of the pandemic. Domestic violence services are mostly funded through local levies and fees and are uneven across the state. Federal funds of \$8.7 million temporarily increased total state-wide resources for staff, hotel rooms to allow survivors to physically distance from perpetrators and other pandemic-related costs.<sup>3</sup> However, these dedicated funds are unavailable to meet other needs or replace budget shortfalls, and they will expire or be used up, leaving a vacuum to serve rising needs. At the same time, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network has lost \$7.7 million in annual federal Victims Of Crime Act (VOCA) funding.<sup>4</sup> Centers may be forced to scale back services even as the need increases amid the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>5</sup> Lawmakers should boost state funding for domestic violence programs from the existing level of \$1 million to \$7.7 million.

## Support families who step up to care for kids

**Recommendation:** Adhere to Glisson Case ruling and provide kinship care givers the same support as foster parents

**Agency:** Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

All children need love and a safe, stable environment that supports healthy growth and development. Yet poverty, racism and the ongoing opiate addiction crisis have resulted in many Ohio children enduring the trauma of separation from their family of origin. Children in the child welfare system who are placed with relatives — called kinship caregivers — receive far less financial support from the state of Ohio than children placed in a licensed foster care setting. A federal court ruling was supposed to change that in Ohio. The *D.O. v. Glisson* ruling confirmed that children in state custody placed with approved kin caregivers have a right to the same payment rate as children placed in a licensed foster care setting. Nearly four years after the ruling, Ohio has provided no additional funding and remains in violation of federal law.<sup>6</sup> Advocates recently filed a lawsuit to bring the state into compliance.<sup>7</sup> Governor DeWine and state lawmakers must take corrective action in the next state budget and provide the additional financial support the roughly 4,500 children and their approved relative caregivers deserve.

## Keep seniors safe in their homes

**Recommendation:** Provide \$22 million annually for adult protective services

**Agency:** Ohio Department of Aging

*Line item: 600534*

Ohio's rural areas, towns and cities are strengthened when aging Ohioans can stay connected to their communities. The HealthPath Foundation estimates that 105,000 elderly Ohioans are abused each year. Ohio's Office of Elder Justice estimates the number may run as high as 250,000.<sup>8</sup> Ohio needs 350 case workers to handle that caseload. At about \$65,000 a year per caseworker — including overhead — that would cost approximately \$22.75 million a year.<sup>9</sup> State lawmakers appropriated \$4.2 million for adult protective services in FY 2021. It's not enough to meet the need. Some counties pass property tax levies for senior services but access to protection is not uniform across counties: The poorest places, where the need may be the highest, are the most likely to lack resources to protect seniors. Ohio's lawmakers have increased funding for this purpose in recent budgets, but far more state support is needed.

## Improve quality of life for seniors

**Recommendation:** Fund Senior Community Services Program at \$10 million a year

**Agency:** Ohio Department of Aging

*Line item: 490411*

This program provides flexible funding to meet the needs of Ohio's seniors aging in their homes. Lawmakers have cut funding for the program in half in the last two decades, not adjusted for inflation. The governor cut the program in the current budget, but Older Americans Act CARES Act dollars temporarily filled the gap. The pandemic demonstrates the importance of flexible funding to meet the needs of older Ohioans who live in the community, particularly in terms of food and social isolation. Yet with increased pressures caused by the COVID crisis, Meals on Wheels, with funding from the Senior Community Services program, is now unable to meet demand and need.<sup>10</sup> The line item for Senior Community Services, funded at \$8.1 million in 2021, should be increased to \$10 million in 2022 and the same level for 2023; the funding should be provided to local agencies on aging to meet the needs of their communities.

## Stabilize families experiencing deep poverty

**Recommendation:** Increase the basic OWF cash grant by \$100 a month per recipient to an average of \$311 a month.

**Agency:** Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

*Line items: 600410, 600658, and 600689*

Research shows that living in deep poverty compromises children’s ability to grow and negatively impacts their earnings, income, and health as adults.<sup>11</sup> The cash assistance component of the federal TANF program, called Ohio Works First (OWF), supports the health and safety of children and families with very low incomes by providing direct cash assistance to help with food, safe housing, health care and other basic necessities.<sup>12</sup> The DeWine administration should draw on a budget surplus in that program built up over the years and increase the basic OWF cash grant in the 2022-23 budget by a minimum of \$100 a month, for an average payment of \$311 a month per recipient. The increase will help more families get by during the pandemic recession and better support the health and safety of children. Lawmakers should also use the budget bill to maintain eligibility for all currently enrolled during the health and economic crisis.

## Help Ohioans find support

**Recommendation:** \$540,000 in state funding to support local 211 services

**Agencies:** Department of Medicaid, Department of Job and Family Services

The 211 call-in help center serves millions of Ohioans with free and confidential 24-hour access to a compassionate professional who reviews options for help, develops a plan and connects them to needed services. While many of Ohio’s 88 counties support 211 services, 34 counties did not have such a service before the pandemic. Emergency funds have stretched the service to all counties for the time being, but it will be needed on an ongoing basis. The Health Equity Network, including the United Ways of Ohio, recommend the 2022-23 state operating budget include \$540,000 to complement local government, corporate and philanthropic dollars supporting the 211 service and ensure all Ohioans in every county can find help when they need it, now and in the future.

## Notes

- 1 "Ohio Housing Needs Assessment: Fiscal Year 2021," Executive Summary, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, accessed on December 2, 2020, <https://bit.ly/39I4lmV>.
- 2 "Home Matters to Ohio," Ohio Affordable Trust Fund at <https://bit.ly/3nGwOhi>
- 3 Patton, "Cuts, costs and cares act funds," Op. Cit.
- 4 VOCA funds are being spent down without replenishment from either tax dollars or the fines from financial fraud (prosecutions that comprised most of the fund).
- 5 Mackenzie Klemann, "Crossroads Crisis Center faces funding cuts," limaohio.com, November 26, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2JY7B3c>
- 6 Petrik, Will, "Support Ohio children by funding kinship care," November 18, 2020, Policy Matters Ohio, <https://bit.ly/3mThXzq>
- 7 Welsh-Huggins, Andrew, "Ohio sued over lower payments to relatives caring for kids," AP News, November 19, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3n7LiX8>
- 8 "Preventing elder abuse in Ohio," The HealthPath Foundation, August 2015 at <https://bit.ly/2xYFIEs>; see also Patton, Wendy, "Protecting Older Ohioans," Policy Matters Ohio, November 1, 2018 at <https://bit.ly/3791a6a>
- 9 Patton, Wendy, "Protecting Older Ohioans," Policy Matters Ohio, November 1, 2018 at <https://bit.ly/3791a6a>
- 10 Goshay, Charita, "Meals on Wheels struggling for funds, volunteers," Canton Repository, December 18, 2020 at <https://bit.ly/2K8AAI7>
- 11 "A roadmap to reducing child poverty," Consensus study report highlights, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, February 2019, <https://bit.ly/3qFTpwj>
- 12 Blaine, Nicholas J., "LBO Analysis of Enacted Budget, Greenbook, Department of Job and Family Services," C1:1 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, August 2019, <https://bit.ly/3nPsOLO>