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Policy Matters testifies in support of unemployment compensation for military spouses, against expanding movie tax break

Policy Matters weighed in on two bills before state legislators today. Researcher Hannah Halbert testified before the Senate Finance Committee in support of legislation to extend unemployment benefits to military spouses who have to leave their jobs due to relocation of an enlisted spouse. Senior Project Director Wendy Patton testified before the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee against a bill to expand the state's motion picture tax credit.

HB 158: Unemployment compensation for military spouses

Halbert said HB 158, the bill that extends unemployment benefits to military spouses, is smart policy but should go even further. Forty-six states permit relocating military spouse to file for unemployment benefits; 26 of these include coverage for non-military relocations.

"Assisting workers who leave their jobs because their spouse is relocating for work is important not just for military families, but all families," she said. "Today's workforce, with its two-worker families, is very different than the workforce of the 1930s, when the unemployment system was created. Working Ohioans should not face extra hardship when they must leave their jobs to keep their families together."

Halbert said HB 158 would be improved if lawmakers changed the revised code to fix flaws with the mutualized account, which is meant to pay for unemployment compensation when no individual employer is responsible. However, no employer has been charged any regular mutualized tax since 2012.

HB 525: Motion picture tax credit

HB 525 would increase the cap on the motion picture tax credit from \$40 million to \$100 million a year and broaden it to include the production of Broadway-bound plays. Patton said next year it would cost the state's General Revenue Fund an estimated \$58 million, and local governments and public libraries an estimated \$2 million. Patton said researchers at Cleveland State University found the state spent \$32 million on the tax credit between 2011 and 2015, but tax revenue from the economic activity it generated amounted to only \$22 million during that time.

"If Ohio wants to dedicate \$100 million a year to stimulate the motion picture and theater industry, we should debate the merits of creating a new grant program side by side with the need for funding our schools, ensuring clean water or ending the drug epidemic," Patton said.