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ADVOCATES FOR OHIO'S FUTURE
PRESS CONFERENCE
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STATEMENT BY COL OWENS, AOF CO-CHAIR

Advocates for Ohio's Future believes it is never too late to do the right thing.

During the recession Ohio was forced to disinvest in many critical health and human services. Today we are continuing to emerge from that difficult time, the worst in our country since the Great Depression. Our common task, as citizens and as public officials, is to determine how best to utilize available resources to reinvest, to re-capture the quality of life we enjoyed prior to the recession, and to make additional investments that would allow us to pursue an even higher quality of life.

The harsh reality for too many workers is that a job does not mean a living. From 2003 to 2013, the median family income in Ohio declined, from \$53,000 to \$47,000. Thus half of Ohio's families are making less than \$47,000 - less than 200% FPL, what economists say is necessary for families of four to cover their basic needs. Many making minimum wage live below the poverty level. Meanwhile, costs to support families have gone up. While unemployment has fallen, the trend is toward more low-wage, part-time and temporary jobs.

Human services play a key role in stabilizing individuals and families, so they can participate in the 21st century economy. Bold policy reform and investments are needed so Ohioans can climb the ladder up and out of poverty. We need targeted investments in our greatest asset – our people.

A budget is a moral document. It must reflect our most basic and cherished values, and be accountable to the needs of all Ohioans. This is AOF's goal.

By working together in a positive and constructive manner, we can make Ohio once again a great place for all Ohioans to live and work. By taking action on the priorities listed below we can ensure that

- Good jobs and a better prepared workforce will be created, resulting in greater opportunities for all Ohioans to help make Ohio's economy stronger.
- Human services systems will be revitalized, to provide essential support to Ohioans in crisis or in need.
- Quality health care will be available to all Ohioans, creating healthier families and communities.
- Essential human resources—food, health care, job training, work supports, education, child care, and transportation assistance – will be available to those in need.

Our diversity, our belief in democracy, and our efforts to find common ground with those who share our values will together make Ohio's future strong, credible and durable.

AOF's priorities can be summarized as follows:

- **The only way out of poverty is a job.** We support an intensive case management program that provides Ohioans unable to enter the workforce on their own with the opportunity to do so. Case management must be able to identify barriers and connect them to all needed services.
- **Low-wage employment must be coupled with work supports.** A job by itself is often not enough. Work supports -- child care, earned income tax credit, food assistance and Medicaid -- enable workers to climb the economic ladder to a livable wage and economic stability. The road out of poverty is long and arduous. Work support benefits are a critical component.
- **We must improve the circumstances of direct care workers.** To ensure that individuals in need of direct care assistance receive the care they need, we must strengthen Ohio's direct service workforce -- people who provide assistance with activities of daily living. We must improve their training, work conditions, and compensation.
- **Ohio's Medicaid Program must maintain, without barriers or cuts, affordable, quality health care for low income Ohioans.** Medicaid is a key work support. A healthy workforce is a productive workforce. If pregnant women lose Medicaid at too low an income level they could be without coverage for almost a year, until the next open enrollment period. Loss of pre-natal care increases risk of premature birth and infant mortality. Pregnant women below 200% FPL need Medicaid.
- **We must address the silent epidemic of elder abuse.** An estimated 1 in 10 older Americans are abused or neglected every year, often at the hands of family members, caregivers or others entrusted to protect them. Yet only 1 in 8 of those instances is reported. Victims are often unable or afraid to tell, fearing harm or removal from their homes. Additional funding is required.
- **We must improve permanency outcomes for abused and neglected children.** Lifelong families and connections are essential for abused and neglected children. Current resources are insufficient to achieve this. We must create a study group to address multi-system youth so parents no longer have to relinquish custody to gain services. We must address the physical and behavioral health needs of children and families, including trauma and addiction, to help families stay together.
- **The Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program must continue their successful public/private partnerships.** State funding provided foodbanks is spent directly on food and related purchases. Much of it is paid directly to Ohio farmers, providing them an outlet for their products that might otherwise go unused. We can assist hungry Ohioans, who might otherwise not have access to high-quality, wholesome foods, with those grown or raised here in our state.
- **Ohio needs a modernized and expanded array of behavioral health services.** We need additional resources to address behavioral health infrastructure, service capacity, and workforce challenges. Continued investment in recovery supports is essential. We must approach carve-in into managed care in a thoughtful and deliberative manner, for all populations, including adults and children in custody.

These issues must receive serious attention by the Senate before final action on the 2016-17 state budget.

Ohio can continue to be a great place to live and work. **It is never too late to do the right thing.**