



**OHIO  
CHILDREN'S  
BUDGET**  
2022-2023

November 12, 2020

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Mike DeWine  
Governor of Ohio

The Honorable Jon A. Husted  
Lt. Governor of Ohio

Senate President Larry Obhof

Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko

Speaker of the House Robert R. Cupp

Minority Leader Emilia S. Sykes

Dear Governor DeWine, Lt. Governor Husted, President Obhof, Minority Leader Yuko, Speaker Cupp, and Minority Leader Sykes,

While children make up 22% of Ohio's population, they represent 100% of Ohio's future. The budget is a moral document that is a reflection of our priorities as a state – we must do right by the children of Ohio. The pandemic and subsequent economic downturn has disproportionately impacted children and families of color and exposed huge gaps in our social safety net for children and families.

The Ohio Children's Budget Coalition, composed of over 18 organizations across the state committed to the health and well-being of children, works to advocate for a fair and just children's agenda that addresses the needs of the "whole child" for Ohio's continued success.

We urge you to prioritize our children by protecting essential programs that promote whole child well-being. This means maintaining and building upon investments made in the previous budget that promote health, nutrition, housing security, quality child care, economic stability, strong families, quality education, and critical infrastructure, like broadband, that connects children and families to the services and supports that we all need during these times of pandemic and beyond.

In **Child Health**, Medicaid and other public health programs, like the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), provide the foundation for a lifetime of positive health and serve more than one million children in Ohio. Other programs, like the lead poisoning prevention initiative and the lead hazard abatement program, ensure children have safe and healthy housing and prevent irreversible brain and nervous system damage, which can lead to numerous learning and behavioral challenges and lifelong negative impacts for our children. Cuts to these programs would leave children without the critical services they need to thrive and be healthy.



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Programs that invest in early intervention services, maternal and child health programs, such as Help Me Grow and Infant Mortality Health Grants, as well as school-based health centers and other community-based solutions focused on improving child well-being and health outcomes, are integral to providing children with the start they need to thrive and flourish.

Other critical child health care programs include behavioral health, funding in the K-12 education budget for wrap-around services for students, including mental health counselling, mentoring, after school programs, and maintained funding for the Ohio Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma Program (OhioSTART).

In **Quality Childcare and K-12 Education**, our children's opportunities to gain the social, economic, cultural and political capital necessary to flourish into adulthood and give back to their communities is inextricably tied to their access to high quality education early in life and quality educational experiences through childhood and into adulthood. Quality early child care programs are crucial and support our youngest Ohioans in their healthy development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills as they prepare to enter kindergarten.

Further, ensuring educational equity throughout a child's life means that we must address access to high-quality teachers, content, and programming for all students, especially for children who are living in low income families, disabled, experiencing homelessness, in foster care, learning English as a second language, returning from juvenile detention, or encountering other barriers to educational opportunity. We also seek to elevate the social emotional needs of youth and ensure they have access to the supports that address the "whole child", like school counselors, social workers, and psychologists, especially during COVID-19, whether this is in their school buildings or in a virtual setting.

In **Children Services**, it is critical that Ohio maintain the historic investments it began in the last biennium to stabilize its child protection system. Ohio must begin with the premise that children should be raised in families, not institutions. If children must leave their families for a time, they should be placed with kin if possible and as close to home as possible. Prevention services should be provided before the need for removal arises. When Ohio implements Family First in 2021, federal IV-E funding will become available for certain evidence-based services to prevent children from coming into foster care. Federal reimbursement for foster youth placed in residential treatment centers that do not meet new quality standards will be eliminated, requiring more foster families. Ohio must continue to invest in children services to support this transformation to Family First, including funding for prevention services and foster care recruitment, as well as funding to support the children services workforce who face staggering challenges every day.

**Youth Justice** includes funding for community-based alternatives to incarceration that have proven outcomes for youth. These programs include Ohio's Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) initiative,



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which funds evidence-based and-informed programs including high fidelity wraparound services, family-based therapies, and trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy. It also includes maintained funding for youth services grant funding to meet the needs of justice-involved youth who may have a history of complex issues such as mental health, substance abuse, trauma, and family instability. Additionally, support for vocational training to leverage community partnerships is needed to better support reentry for justice system-involved youth.

In **Economic Stability**, food and nutrition assistance, child care subsidies, housing assistance, and income support programs will lift and keep children and families out of poverty. The pandemic has made it a struggle for Ohioans to keep food on the table. From March through June, **more than 2.9 million Ohioans were served by a pantry or food bank**, an all-time record high for the foodbanks in Ohio. Additionally, federal child nutrition program have played a vital role in providing food access to children serving over 2.4 million meals in grab and go settings, and over 13 million meals in afterschool programs, summer settings, family childcare homes, and daycare centers. The need for food assistance is also reflected in applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Applications surged in Ohio during the first two months of the pandemic then dropped back to more normal levels after Congress approved a stimulus package that included \$600 in additional monthly unemployment benefits. However, as those additional monthly unemployment benefits ended in July, SNAP applications picked up again in August. Families are not forced into making impossible decisions when it comes to the health of their children.

The pandemic has also highlighted the critical need for a **safe, decent, affordable home** where families can stay healthy and children can learn. A recent report from the National Council of State Housing Agencies estimates that up to 400,000 Ohio households are at-risk of eviction. Ohio must expand resources to ensure children and families can stay safely in their own homes during this public health crisis. The State should build on the modest expansion of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund included in the last budget, maintain and increase the \$5 million appropriation for the Ohio Department of Health to address youth homelessness, and allocate additional TANF funding for the Housing Now for Homeless Families program to quickly move children and families out of shelters and in to permanent housing. We also recommend building on the successful Healthy Beginnings at Home pilot to two or three additional communities where housing assistance can help protect families at high risk of infant mortality.

In **Critical Broadband Infrastructure**, all Ohioans must have access to reliable broadband internet. Over 1 million Ohioans have little to no access to the internet and even more lack access to devices for access, and lack the resources to pay for internet subscriptions. Broadband is being coined by many as a Super-Determinant of Health, in that there are few areas of our lives that are not impacted by access. We especially see this now during the pandemic where two Ohio's exist - one where distance learning for students, higher education access, workforce development training, remote work, telehealth, and a myriad of other opportunities exist as a result of broadband, devices, and subscriptions. However, for



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far too many Ohioans, these opportunities are simply out of reach due to where a person lives, their lack of resources, or both obstacles. The pandemic has revealed the weakness of our infrastructure that must be addressed.

We appreciate your commitment and dedication to the children of Ohio. Maintained investments that nurture the whole child will lead to a flourishing Ohio. The Ohio Children's Budget Coalition stands ready to work with you in the coming weeks and months to make sure that Ohio's children and families are priorities in this biennial budget.

Sincerely,

Tracy Nájera

*Executive Director*

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and Representing the Ohio Children's Budget Coalition

[www.ohiochildrensbudget.org](http://www.ohiochildrensbudget.org)