



THE OHIO
WOMEN'S
PUBLIC POLICY NETWORK

STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES

THE OHIO WOMEN'S PUBLIC POLICY NETWORK OUTLINES AN OHIO BUDGET THAT SUPPORTS, PRIORITIZES, AND INVESTS IN WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES

One of the first priorities of Governor DeWine and the 133rd General Assembly is to draft and implement a new two-year biennial budget for the state of Ohio. The state budget is the most important legislation to the operation of our state government, and it is a reflection of the state's priorities and values.

The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network strongly urges the governor and state legislature to enact a budget that supports, prioritizes, and invests in women. **Below, we have outlined 10 key provisions that should be included in the state budget to provide women with the resources they need to live economically secure, safe, and healthy lives.**

TEN PROVISIONS WE HOPE TO SEE INCLUDED IN THE STATE BUDGET THAT INVEST IN OHIO WOMEN AND FAMILIES:

- **Strengthen the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to help to lift more families out of poverty and provide greater assistance to low- and moderate-income workers.** In Ohio, the EITC has two specific limitations that should be addressed by the state budget: It currently has an income cap and is non-refundable, meaning it cannot exceed what a taxpayer owes in income taxes. The state budget should address these barriers to accessing the state EITC by removing the income cap, making it refundable, and raising the amount to 20 percent of the federal. These reforms will extend much needed assistance to help working women make ends meet and provide for their families.
- **Lay the groundwork for a statewide paid family leave program,** which would allow workers to continue to earn a portion of their paycheck while taking leave to care for and bond with a new child, provide care to an ill or aging loved one, or to address their own serious medical concerns. Currently, only 17 percent of American workers have access to any form of paid family leave through an employer, and only 4 percent of low-wage workers have access. Paid family and medical leave policies provide workers with financial support that they need to take time off of work to care for a loved one or address their own health issue without risking their economic security.

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- **Increase access and affordability of quality child-care for women and families.** High quality childcare ensures that children are prepared for school and helps working mothers remain in the workforce. Unfortunately, childcare is out of reach for many working families due to the high cost of care and the low eligibility level to qualify for public support. We can fix that by raising the eligibility for public childcare aid to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$32,920 for a family of two). We must also invest in Ohio's public childcare workers by paying adequate wages so that workers doing this important job are not themselves stuck in poverty.
 - **Preserve and protect Medicaid expansion, without adding new barriers or obstacles to accessing care.** Medicaid has long been a lifeline for women, especially women in rural areas of the country. In Ohio, women compose more than half (58 percent) of the state's Medicaid population, and nationally, Medicaid covers more than 50 percent of births, playing a critical role in maternal care and health outcomes for babies. It is crucial to preserve the state's Medicaid program, without placing additional costs or barriers to receiving care.
 - **Utilize resources and funding to reduce incarceration and prison overcrowding, focusing the programs on community-based rehabilitation.** Women are the fastest growing prison population in the United States, and women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for drug or property offenses. There should also be specific considerations aimed at **protecting the health and safety of incarcerated women and girls**, such as increased funding for community-based correctional services, restorative justice, and reintegration approaches.
 - **Designate funding for services and programs related to maternal and infant mortality, with a particular focus on explicitly addressing racial and ethnic inequalities, such as requiring all health care professionals to complete cultural competency training.** The United States is the most dangerous developed nation in the world for women to give birth, and Ohio faces a maternal mortality rate above the national average. Nationally, Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related deaths compared to white women as a result of racial disparities in access to and quality of care; discrimination and implicit bias in the health care system experienced before, during, and after pregnancy; and stress and trauma associated with structural and institutional racism.
 - **Increase funding, resources, and staff for the Bureau of Wage and Hour Administration to more efficiently and effectively address wage theft.** Wage theft occurs when a worker is not given their legally or contractually promised wages, such as violating minimum-wage laws, failing to pay overtime, or forcing an employer to continue to work after they are off-the-clock. Ohio has the second highest share of workers who are victims of minimum wage violations, with more than 5 percent of Ohio workers, and nearly 23 percent of low-wage workers failing to receive their full compensation under minimum wage law. While the state has some measures in place, there needs to be a greater investment and targeted enforcement of wage theft in the state.
 - **Expand funding for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programs to provide additional support to low-income families.** Despite the high demand, Ohio has an estimated more than half billion dollars in unutilized TANF funds. The state budget must increase TANF benefits to help support women and families living in poverty. It is also important that the TANF funding is allocated without any of that funding being made to the Parenting and Pregnancy Program, also known as so-called "Crisis Pregnancy Centers," which lie to pregnant woman about their options, including abortion.
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- **Allocate adequate funding to services and programs in the state of Ohio that support survivors and victims of sexual and domestic violence, specifically the Rape Crisis Fund and the Ohio Domestic Violence Program.** The state budget should increase funding for the Rape Crisis Fund (RCF) to \$3 million per fiscal year (\$6 million total), expanding the availability of services in counties currently without services, while sustaining and growing existing services in the state. There are currently gaps in counties operating without comprehensive rape crisis services, meaning that many survivors and victims must travel long distances to access the services they need or go without receiving them. An increased investment in the RCF would help rape crisis centers provide critical programs and services for survivors and victims, such as an advocate to work directly with survivors and preventative services, while also directly addressing the increased demand for services. Additionally, the budget should make an allocation of \$5 million per fiscal year (\$10 million total) to the state's Domestic Violence Program, which would help support and improve crucial services and programming for domestic violence survivors and victims through the state's 67 DV programs, such as education to prevent domestic violence, victim advocacy and support, and transitional services. Unlike most states, Ohio provides no general funds to support DV programs, meaning that one-fourth of Ohio's counties do not have a DV program, while existing programs rely on competitive federal grants and funding from their counties' marriage and divorce license fees to continue.
- **Ensure that the state is investing in a successful census effort by dedicating funding allocation for planning and outreach at the Development Services Agency.** Ensuring a complete and accurate Census count is especially important in Ohio for women and for historically undercounted communities, such as low-income, rural, immigrant, and minority populations. An undercount would affect the equitable distribution of all public funds and most directly the more than \$21 billion of federal funds that are allocated in Ohio. Many of the largest programs in the state with funding allocation tied to Census data have a disparate effect on the economic security, health, and livelihood of women and their families, including Medicaid, Second 8 Housing Assistance, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).



The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network is a coalition of more than 30 advocacy organizations focused on promoting policies that create economic security for women and strengthen Ohio families. Using a collective voice that represents the women of our state, this network works to ensure that public policy reflects the true needs of women and families.

For more information, visit our website at

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The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network is made possible by generous support from

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