The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network Outlines a State Operating Budget That Supports, Prioritizes, and Invests in Women and Their Families
The Ohio Women’s Public Policy Network is a coalition of nearly 40 organizations working collaboratively to advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and their families. Equity is pivotal to our mission as a coalition and should remain a fundamental consideration in all policy creation. We recognize that, historically, our country’s laws and policies have reinforced and perpetuated gender discrimination, structural and institutional racism, and bias against marginalized communities. In collaboration with our partners, we are dedicated to confronting and addressing these barriers by working to advance policies that create fair opportunity and equal prosperity for women and their families, particularly within the state operating budget - the most important piece of legislation to the operation of our state.

As the state budget process takes place for FY 2022 - 2023, we strongly urge the governor and state legislature to enact a budget that supports, prioritizes, and invests in women and families. The following report outlines policy recommendations that lawmakers should adopt throughout the budget process. We are determined to ensure that women’s needs are prioritized and we will use our collective voice to make these needs heard by our state lawmakers during the budget and beyond. You can find more information online, at www.womenspublicpolicynetwork.org.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE WOMEN’S PUBLIC POLICY NETWORK INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- ACLU of Ohio
- ACTION OHIO
- American Association of University Women, Ohio
- Catholics for Choice
- Children’s Defense Fund - Ohio
- Closing the Women’s Wealth Gap
- Equality Ohio
- Equitas Health
- #Fight4HER
- Hadassah Columbus
- Innovation Ohio Education Fund
- Jobs with Justice, Cleveland Chapter
- Juvenile Justice Coalition
- NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
- National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter
- National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Cleveland Chapter
- National Council of Jewish Women
- Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
- Ohio Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)
- Ohio Domestic Violence Network
- Ohio Federation of Teachers
- Ohio National Organization for Women
- Ohio Progressive Asian Women’s Leadership (OPAWL)
- Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (Ohio RCRC)
- Ohio Urban Resources Systems (O.U.R.S.)
- Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
- Policy Matters Ohio
- Preterm
- Restoring Our Own Through Transformation (ROOTT)
- The Women’s Fund of Central Ohio
- The Women’s Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation
- UHCAN Ohio
- URGE: United for Reproductive and Gender Equality
- YWCA Columbus
- YWCA Dayton
- YWCA Greater Cincinnati

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No matter where we live, what we look like, or what we do for a living, all Ohioans deserve the ability to live economically secure, safe, and healthy lives. When our state policymakers come together to enact policies that invest in women and their families, it strengthens our communities, builds a more equitable future, and creates opportunities for all Ohioans.

One of the most crucial undertakings by Governor DeWine and the 134th General Assembly (2021 - 2022) is to draft and implement a two-year biennial operating budget for the state of Ohio. The state budget is a reflection of the funding and policy priorities for the future of Ohio and our communities. It impacts the quality of life of women, children, and families. The global pandemic and accompanying catastrophic economic crisis of the last year make this an unprecedented budget cycle. At the forefront of these crises stands the reverberating call for racial justice and equality, as Black and Latinx women experience disproportionate levels of disadvantage in our current health and economic climate. Moreover, the racial reckoning our nation has faced in the last year stemming from the Black Lives Matter protest movement has highlighted the need to confront the systemic racism and oppression in our economic, health care, criminal justice, policing, and education systems. Now is the time for state lawmakers to take bold action through the state budget to build an Ohio that works for us all.

Below, we have included ten key provisions that policymakers should include in the state budget to address racial and gender inequalities (which have been exacerbated by the pandemic) rebuild from the economic recession we are facing, and provide women with the resources they need to thrive:

1. Strengthen the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to help provide greater assistance to low-income workers, especially for working mothers of color
2. Increase access to and affordability of quality child care
3. Increase access to and affordability of high-quality housing, particularly for Black women who experience disproportionately higher rates of eviction
4. Preserve and protect Medicaid, without adding new barriers and obstacles to accessing care or increased threat of losing care
5. Designate funding for services and programs addressing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, with a focus on ending racial and ethnic inequalities facing Black women and women of color
6. Expand and improve programs that provide security and stability for Ohioans with low income
7. Boost investments to services and programs in the state of Ohio that support survivors and victims of sexual and domestic violence
8. Increase funding, resources, and staff for the Ohio Bureau of Wage and Hour Administration to more efficiently and effectively address wage theft
9. Utilize resources and funding to reduce incarceration and prison overcrowding, focusing the programs on community-based rehabilitation
10. Expand access to Paid Family and Medical Leave for working Ohioans
By taking action to strengthen the state EITC, state lawmakers can lift more families out of poverty, push back against racial income disparities, and provide greater assistance to low-wage workers. State lawmakers made improvements to the Ohio EITC in the transportation budget last session, but these policy changes did little to help Ohioans in the bottom income quintile, who earn less than $22,000 per year. With a refundable EITC, a family whose tax credit is larger than the income taxes they owe will receive the difference in a refund.

Because Ohio’s EITC is non-refundable, taxpayers receive no benefit when their tax credit is larger than the taxes they owe. Many low-wage Ohioans do not owe income taxes, which means that they do not receive any help from the state EITC. Of the 29 states and territories with EITCs, Ohio is one of only six states with a non-refundable credit. Making the EITC 10% refundable will improve the lives of 758,800 Ohio families and help working women make ends meet and provide for their families, especially women of color who are more likely to benefit from a refundable tax credit.
High quality child care helps working parents and guardians – especially women – remain in the workforce. A single mother of two earning $15 per hour spends half her income on child care yet makes too much to qualify for public support. Raising the initial eligibility for public child care aid would make her eligible for public support. Even before the pandemic, the high cost of child care put it out of reach for many working families. Ohio must reduce the cost of high-quality child care to help stabilize families and ensure women have a shot at good jobs, and can stay in the workforce.

The pandemic has pushed many child care providers out of business, while others have had to reduce their enrollment capacity. This means that many mothers no longer have a safe, affordable place to care for their children. Studies have shown that women ages 25–44 are three times as likely as men to be out of work during the pandemic due to disrupted child care arrangements. We cannot restart our economy until we address the child care crisis. State lawmakers must also invest in the state’s child care infrastructure by ensuring that child care workers are paid a living wage and provided good benefits.

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2.) ALL MOTHERS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, CLASS, OR ZIP CODE, DESERVE TO GO TO WORK KNOWING THEIR KIDS HAVE A SAFE, NURTURING PLACE TO GO. HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE MUST BE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL WHO NEED IT.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Raise initial eligibility for publicly funded child care aid to 200% of the poverty line ($19.98 per hour or less for a family of three)
- Provide direct financial assistance to child care centers so that they can remain open despite increased operating costs and decreased enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Invest in the child care infrastructure by ensuring that child care workers are paid a living wage and provided good benefits

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3.) ALL OHIOANS SHOULD HAVE THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF STABLE HOUSING, ONE OF OUR MOST BASIC HUMAN NEEDS. LAWMAKERS MUST INCREASE ACCESS TO AND AFFORDABILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY HOUSING.

Quality, stable housing is one of our most basic human needs. Lack of affordable and safe housing disproportionately affects Black Ohioans, tied largely to our history of discriminatory and racially targeted policies and practices in rental housing. Black single mothers are particularly vulnerable to higher rates of eviction. Research estimates that on the national level, 1 in 5 Black women are evicted during their lifetime, compared with 1 in 15 white women. Stable, safe housing is linked directly to a host of benefits for children, especially children of color who face higher rates of housing insecurity. Housing impacts children’s readiness for school, short- and long-term health outcomes, and mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to economic difficulties for millions of Ohioans, including an increase in housing insecurity as many people struggle to pay their rent under the strain of lost or reduced income. The unemployment and economic fallouts of the crisis disproportionately affect Black and Latinx women, compounding the racial disparities in housing security and eviction rates that already existed. Throughout the pandemic, renters of color have reported less overall confidence in their ability to pay rent at disproportionately higher rates than white renters. Increasing funding to the Housing Trust Fund and the TANF-funded “Housing Now for Homeless Families” will help families experiencing housing insecurity and narrow the racial disparities in access to safe and affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Increase funding to the Housing Trust Fund to more effectively aid families at risk of homelessness and housing insecurity
- Boost funding to the TANF-funded “Housing Now for Homeless Families” to provide stability and quick rehousing of women and families experiencing homelessness
Access to health care is essential to bolster the health, well-being, and economic security of women and their families. The job loss, health problems, and economic insecurity brought on by COVID-19 have made the need for a Medicaid expansion more important than ever before. Medicaid has long been a lifeline for women, especially women in rural areas. In Ohio, women compose more than half (55%) of the state’s Medicaid population. As a result of structural racism and the systemic barriers to economic opportunity, Black women make up a disproportionate share of Medicaid enrollees, and they would be uniquely harmed by restrictions to the program.

Medicaid covers more than 50% of births, playing a critical role in maternal care and health outcomes for babies. Medicaid expansion can provide support to new moms and babies, ultimately leading to declines in maternal and infant mortality. This would be particularly significant for Black women, who have infant and maternal mortality rates over two-and-a-half times that of white women. Moreover, expanding Medicaid coverage could decrease the racial disparities in COVID-19 related deaths of essential workers by ensuring that lower wage workers are able to access care when they need it. It is crucial to preserve the state’s Medicaid program, without placing additional costs or barriers to receiving care.

4.) WE SHOULD ALL BE ABLE TO ACCESS HEALTH CARE WHEN WE NEED IT. LAWMAKERS MUST PRESERVE AND PROTECT MEDICAID, WITHOUT ADDING NEW BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES TO ACCESSING CARE OR INCREASED THREAT OF LOSING CARE.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Maintain current eligibility levels to access the state’s Medicaid program
- Protect from barriers to losing care, such as unnecessary and burdensome work requirements

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STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES
Every new mother, whether Black, Brown, or White, deserves to be treated with value, dignity, and care. We can do this by investing in efforts to address maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, with a focus on ending racial and ethnic inequalities facing Black women and women of color.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**
- Strengthen funding for the Ohio Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review Board (PAMR) to support research on pregnancy-associated deaths and the growth of a more diverse executive board
- Extend Medicaid eligibility for pregnant people to provide continuous coverage for up to 12-months postpartum
- Allow for Medicaid and private insurance coverage of doula and midwife services
- Allocate funding for ongoing implicit bias and cultural humility training within hospitals and birthing facilities

We must ensure that all new mothers can thrive, and that begins with strong support for maternal health. Unfortunately, the United States is the most dangerous developed nation in the world to give birth. As of 2018, Ohio is in the top 10 states with the highest infant mortality rate, and our mortality rate for Black infants is almost three times that of white infants. The mortality rate of Black women in Ohio is over 2.5 times that of white women. An Ohio Department of Health report found that over half of maternal deaths in Ohio between 2008 and 2016 were preventable,12 which means that allocating resources towards programs that focus on maternal and infant mortality and ending racial disparities in birth outcomes can save lives. Increased health risks and changes in protocols and policies at hospitals during the coronavirus pandemic are all realities that further threaten maternal health outcomes.

Black women are disproportionately impacted by the structural and institutional racism embedded into our medical and health care systems. The implicit and explicit bias that they receive from providers ultimately prevents them from experiencing optimal health, well-being, and birth outcomes. Funding on-going bias and cultural humility training programs could lead to improvements in: focus on racial disparities in access to and quality of care; discrimination and bias in the health care system; and stress and trauma associated with structural and institutional racism. Doula services provide resources that help address both infant mortality and mother morbidity, especially for Black mothers across Ohio. Black mothers in particular face specific racial disparities through their pregnancy, during birth, and postpartum that doula services are able to directly address and correct to lead to stronger maternal and infant health outcomes.
The pandemic and recession are having a disproportionate impact on Black and brown families experiencing poverty. State leaders need to ensure families with low- or no-income can continue to put food on the table, pay the rent, and get basic necessities. Research shows that the experience of deep poverty compromises children’s ability to grow and negatively impacts their earnings, income, and health as adults. State lawmakers can allocate one-time emergency assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to provide families with immediate, emergency needs and move money directly into communities and local economies.

Additionally, we need to provide more direct cash assistance to support the health and safety of children and families instead of diverting critical TANF resources to other entities, like The Ohio Pregnancy and Parenting Program (also known as "Crisis Pregnancy Centers"). which are usually not medically licensed and do not help alleviate the financial and material hardships that families are facing right now. TANF funds should go to families. A greater share of female Ohioans are living in poverty (15.8%) compared to male Ohioans (13%), and this number has grown over time. Increasing cash assistance will provide immediate relief to women and families living in poverty, especially Black and brown women and families.
EVERY WOMAN DESERVES TO LIVE FREE FROM VIOLENCE. LAWMAKERS MUST DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO A VIOLENCE FREE FUTURE BY INVESTING IN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT SUPPORT SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Increase funding for the Rape Crisis Fund (RCF) to $10 million per fiscal year ($20 million total), expanding the availability of services in counties currently without services, while sustaining and growing existing services in the state.
- Increase funding for the state’s Domestic Violence Program to $7.7 million per fiscal year ($15.4 million total), which would help support and improve crucial services and programming for domestic violence survivors and victims as the need for these services increases and evolves during the pandemic.

Gender-based violence affects women and girls of all races, ages, classes, and ethnic backgrounds, but women of color and other marginalized women experience disparate impacts from violence. In Ohio, rates of intimate partner violence have increased during the pandemic due to shelter-at-home protocols. Research found that throughout the pandemic, due to the disproportionate rates of financial and employment insecurity experienced by women of color - particularly Black and Latinx women - survivors of color are more likely to remain in or return to unsafe situations.

At the same time, programs and organizations serving survivors have experienced sharp funding declines from the loss of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding. This has caused a profound negative impact on individuals and families experiencing violence in Ohio, and on the programs that provide them with critically needed services and work to prevent violence. Many programs reported being forced to cut staff, reevaluate how work can be done remotely, and streamline their services. This could have a long-lasting damaging impact on the women and families who are no longer able to receive these essential services from the trusted provider in their community.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: Ohio relies on just 34 community-based Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) to serve sexual violence survivors in 77 of Ohio’s 88 counties. RCCs employ hospital advocates (who accompany survivors during sexual assault forensic medical examinations) and legal advocates and provide sexual assault wraparound services (counseling, attorneys, housing solutions, financial remedies, workplace and school accommodations and other resources). With COVID-19 costs and the simultaneous huge increase in sexual violence and child sexual abuse and exploitation, Ohio’s 34 Rape Crisis Centers have cut staff, reduced prevention, and planned for reducing counties served. Without an increase to $10 million per fiscal year, RCCs will shut down services in approximately half of the counties currently receiving services. An increased investment in fund would help RCCs provide critical programs and services for survivors and victims, such as an advocate to work directly with survivors and preventative services.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: During the pandemic, with increased rates of domestic violence, there has also been greater limitations for survivors and victims to seek resources and help, creating higher demand for programs that serve survivors and victims. The Ohio Domestic Violence Program provides crucial programs and services for survivors and victims through the state’s 75 DV programs, such as emergency housing, education to prevent domestic violence, victim advocacy and support, and transitional services. As the demand for these services increases during the pandemic and delivery of services evolves to adhere to health protocols, it is crucial for lawmakers to make deeper investments.
Every working person, no matter where they are employed, should be treated with dignity at their job and paid their full wages. Unfortunately, many people fall victim to “wage theft” in their jobs, a practice that 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 employee to continue to work after they are off-the-clock. Wage theft harms Ohio’s lowest paid workers, and women are more likely to experience wage theft than men, with women of color being particularly disadvantaged by the practice.

While certain municipalities across Ohio, such as Cincinnati, have made strides in enforcing wage theft policies, most cities and regions in Ohio have not. We need a greater investment in targeted enforcement of wage theft in the state. Ohio currently only has a handful of wage-and-hour investigators, limiting the ability for an increase of strategic enforcement of wage theft policies. In the last state budget process, lawmakers allocated an increase of $1.2 million in funding for the Ohio Bureau of Wage and Hour, but additional investment in the department is needed to further protect Ohio workers from wage theft. This will ensure workers are not losing valuable wages that they are owed to better support themselves and their families.

**RECOMMENDATION:**
- Increase funding for the Ohio Bureau of Wage and Hour to hire additional investigators and allocate more resources to proactively enforce wage theft policies.
Women are the fastest growing prison population in the United States, and Ohio has one of the largest female incarceration rates in the country. Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for drug or property offenses, and in Ohio, this is linked to the rampant opioid epidemic. Funding mental health and addiction recovery services are essential to the rehabilitation of women with drug addiction. Moreover, the pandemic has amplified the urgency of reducing the number of incarcerated individuals and moving toward community-based correctional services and rehabilitation, as incarcerated individuals and prison staff remain at high risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to the extremely close quarters and limited access to personal protective equipment. Providing funds for materials and programs that will improve the health and safety conditions of those who are incarcerated is essential.

Moreover, racial bias and systemic racism has led to a disproportionate number of Black and brown individuals interacting with the criminal justice system in Ohio. Reforming sentencing laws and bail policies could help reduce this bias and lead to a reduction of individuals imprisoned by our system of mass incarceration. Additionally, community-based mental health and substance abuse programs will help decrease the overcrowding and mass incarceration in the criminal justice system, while providing women with the support they need.

9.) EVERY WOMAN SHOULD BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH DIGNITY AND SAFETY. RACIALLY BIASED CRIMINAL JUSTICE LAWS AND OHIO’S OVERCROWDED PRISONS PUT THE HEALTH AND LIVES OF INCARCERATED WOMEN AT RISK, BUT FUNDING COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES CAN LEAD TO AN INCREASE OF REHABILITATION AND A REDUCTION OF INCARCERATION.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Reform sentencing laws and enact bail reform to address racial bias and systemic racism within the criminal justice system and reduce mass incarceration
- Invest in alternatives to incarceration by allocating more funding towards community-based corrections, drug treatment, and probation improvements
Everyone at some point in their life will need to take leave from work to take care for themselves or a loved one. 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, but access to these essential policies is not equal. We need to prioritize providing paid leave to women, people of color, and low-wage workers (who are the least likely to have access through an employer). Nationally, only 25 percent of Latinx workers and 43 percent of Black workers report having access to any permanent paid or partially paid parental leave, compared to 50 percent of white workers, which contributes to racial disparities in health outcomes and economic opportunity.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the immediate need for paid leave as families continue to slip through the cracks of the caregiving system and struggle under the strain of the crisis, especially for women who have left the workforce in alarming numbers to address increased caregiving responsibilities for their families. Currently in Ohio, even unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible to 61 percent of working people. Families should not have to choose between caring for their loved ones or paying their rent. We must expand access to paid family and medical leave for Ohioans to provide direct support to families, promote stronger health outcomes, and strengthen our economy.

10.) ALL WORKING OHIOANS, NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE OR WHAT THEY DO FOR A LIVING, NEED THE TIME AND FLEXIBILITY TO CARE FOR LOVED ONES AND THEMSELVES WITHOUT RISKING THEIR JOB OR PAYCHECK. OHIOANS NEED PAID LEAVE.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Update the Paid Leave program for workers employed by the state of Ohio from 6 weeks of parental leave to 12 weeks of parental, caregiving, and personal medical leave
- Lay the groundwork for a statewide paid family and medical leave program

STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES


