Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 17. My name is Susan Jagers. I am the director of the Ohio Poverty Law Center and I am here today in my role as an Executive Committee member of Advocates for Ohio’s Future (AOF).

AOF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of over 500 state and local health and human services policy, advocacy, and provider organizations that promotes health and human service budget and policy solutions so that all Ohioans live better lives. Our coalition believes in investing in our state’s most valuable resource—our people—to ensure that they are safe, healthy, and can access pathways to prosperity for themselves and their families.

According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, which ran through Feb. 1, an estimated 737,000 Ohioans sometimes or often didn’t have enough to eat over the previous seven days, and 542,000 had little or no confidence in their ability to pay the next month’s rent.

The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services reported 326,000 new and continuing jobless claims as of Jan. 30, 2021.

The last 11 months have tested our safety net programs like no other time. The job and income loss for many Ohioans happened suddenly and has lasted longer than anyone could have predicted. The recovery for those hit the hardest financially will be the slowest.

Fortunately, we had safety net programs. And although not perfect, they were a safety net for many. SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance kept millions of Ohioans fed, housed, and with access to health care. These safety-net programs were reinforced with rule and process flexibility and supplemented by non-traditional unemployment benefits, stimulus payments, and other targeted assistance for rent and utilities. Together, these resources kept your constituents from starving, homelessness, and further despair.

As a coalition of health and human services organizations, many of our members see daily how these programs have held families together and supported their most basic needs. Additionally, service providers like Ohio’s network of foodbanks, are assisting struggling families at levels never seen before.

It is for these reasons we oppose the proposed changes in Senate Bill 17 and question the timing of such an effort. All people need safety and security, especially in the middle of a pandemic and a recession. Public
programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance are the strongest lifelines to ensure our neighbors have the supports they need during these challenging times.

Unlike any issue we have worked on, more of our members and partners have raised concerns about the provisions of Senate Bill 17. In just a week, we had 87 organizations join a sign-on letter to this committee and Senate leadership in opposition.

Collectively, we are concerned about the attempt to cut holes in our already stretched safety-net that will harm low-income, unemployed, and sick Ohioans. Instead, this is the time to study these systems and assess what worked well and should continue and what needs to be strengthened so we are better prepared in the future. The recommendations should be based on the needs of Ohioans and the experience of consumers, program administrators, workers—not cookie-cutter proposals from out-of-state think tanks.

Additionally, we already know that safety net programs can be improved to better support working families by addressing the benefit cliff. The cliff is the sudden and often unexpected decrease in public benefits like SNAP that can occur with a small increase in income. The benefit cliff is a hurdle for families and businesses when wage increases result in a net loss of income for a family.

In the last two weeks, co-chairs Senator Bob Hackett and Representative Mark Fraizer held the first meeting of the Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council—established by the previous General Assembly—which will study the program and make recommendations for improvements. This process should play out before changes are made to the Unemployment Insurance system.

We have all been hearing about fraud in the unemployment compensation insurance system. As Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Director Kimberly Henderson shared in her testimony before the House Finance Committee, most of the reported fraud involves identity theft and is concentrated in the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program—which is a temporary federal program. In Ohio’s traditional unemployment insurance program, far more fraudulent claims have been flagged by the Department than paid.

AOF—with its depth and breadth of its membership and partners—stands ready to assist this committee and the General Assembly to make sure the safety net is strong for those who need it. This means securing robust public assistance policies and rejecting any rules and requirements that dilute the efficacy of programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment compensation.

Our children are counting on all of us to create the Ohio they deserve. We want to live in a state where we create opportunity, care for and invest in people, and focus on equitable recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 17. We urge you to oppose the bill and work towards policies that support the safety and security of Ohioans in times of crisis.
February 24, 2021

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and Members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee,

The leaders of Advocates for Ohio’s Future and the undersigned organizations unite to voice our opposition to the proposed changes in eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and unemployment insurance included in Senate Bill 17. 

All people need safety and security, especially in the middle of a pandemic and a recession. Public programs like SNAP, Medicaid and unemployment insurance are the strongest lifelines to ensure our neighbors have the supports they need during these challenging times.

SB 17 will hurt Ohio’s recovery. It will worsen food security and health outcomes and prevent millions of federal dollars from flowing into Ohio communities. It punishes workers and creates more barriers for children, families, working adults and seniors to get the help they need.

During a time when 737,000 Ohioans didn’t have enough to eat over a week’s time, 1 in 5 Ohio kids are living in poverty and over 130,000 children are uninsured, leaders should be looking for ways to support their struggling neighbors rather than put up more barriers to assistance. If this body wants to help people earning low wages, the General Assembly should instead create a benefit-bridge so workers and families with low-incomes can gain greater stability.

Our children are counting on us to create the Ohio they deserve. We want to live in a state where we create opportunity—not barriers, care for and invest in people and focus on equitable recovery. This means securing robust public assistance policies and strongly rejecting any rules and requirements that, grounded in systemic racism, dilute the efficacy of programs like SNAP, Medicaid and unemployment compensation.

We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 17 and work towards policies that support the safety and security of Ohioans in times of crisis.

Sincerely,
Advocates for Ohio’s Future

AOF Steering Committee Members
Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio
Coalition on Homelessness & Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)
Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development
Human Service Chamber of Franklin County
Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition - MHAC Ohio

AOF Endorsing Organizations
Groundwork Ohio
Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County
Hunger Network in Ohio
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
NOBLE

Advocates for Ohio’s Future
175 S. Third Street, Suite 350, Columbus, OH 43215
614-745-0740 ext. 305 | kbergfeld@communitysolutions.com
www.advocatesforohio.org
AOF Steering Committee Members cont.
Ohio Association of Community Health Centers
Ohio Association of Foodbanks
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Policy Matters Ohio
Public Children Services Association of Ohio
The Center for Community Solutions
UHCAN Ohio

American Heart Association
Amherst Food Pantry
Associate of Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, Ohio
Attica Community Food Pantry
Blessing Basket Food Pantry
Breaking Bread Community Meals
Buckeye Community Hope Foundation - Bellefontaine Manor
Caracole, Inc.
Caring Friends Food Pantry
Christian Temple Disciples of Christ
Circle of Friends
Cleveland Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Steering Committee
COAAA Advisory Council
Coleman Behavioral Health-Kenton
Contact Center
Cuyahoga County Senior and Adult Services Advisory Board
Divine Catering & Events LLC
Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.
Euclid Hunger Center
Finance Fund Capital Corporation
FISH of Tiffin
Five Loaves Food Pantry
Gathering Hope House
Global Parenting Network
Grace Community Dinner
Greater Cleveland Food Bank
Healthy Fathering Collaborative
Impact Mt. Tabor
Indian Lake Villa
Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati
Jefferson County ADAMHS Board
KNAP Sack, Inc.
Liberty Worship Center Helping Hands Pantry

AOF Endorsing Organizations cont.
United Way of Central Ohio
United Way of Greater Toledo
United Way of Summit and Medina
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio
Miami Valley Community Action Partnership
Mid-Ohio Food Collective
Mt Zion UMC Rainbow Ministries
New Hope Community Church Food Pantry
Oberlin Community Services Council
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund
Ohio CDC Association
Ohio Education Association
Ohio Olmstead Task Force
Passages Connecting Fathers and Sons
Pathways Enrichment Center
Physicians Action Network
Pioneer Christian Ministries
Rainbow 1 ST. John’s Lutheran Church
Schubert Center for Child Studies, CWRU
Second Harvest Food Bank CCL
Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio
Single Payer Action Network Ohio
Southeast Ohio Foodbank and Regional Kitchen
St. Patrick Helping Hands
St. Frances X. Cabrini
St. Vincent de Paul, St. Clare Conference
St. Vincent de Paul, Voice of the Poor
The Foodbank, Inc.
The NRP Group LLC
The Ohio Women’s Public Policy Network
Thrive Property Solutions, LLC
Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership
Vine of Hope Community Center
Vineyard Community Church
West Ohio Food Bank
WestCare Ohio, Inc., dba East End Community Services
cc: Senate President Matt Huffman
   President Pro Tempore Jay Hottinger
   Majority Floor Leader Kirk Schuring
   Majority Whip Rob McColley