



June 17, 2021

The Honorable Senator Matt Dolan

The Honorable Senator Theresa Gavarone

The Honorable Senator Vernon Sykes

The Honorable Representative Phil Plummer

The Honorable Representative Scott Oleslager

The Honorable Representative Erica Crawley

Dear Senator Dolan, Senator Gavarone, Senator Sykes, Representative Plummer, Representative Oleslager, and Representative Crawley,

While children make up 22% of Ohio's population, they represent 100% of Ohio's future. The budget is a moral document that reflects our priorities as a state – we must do right by Ohio's children.

As a member of the Ohio Children's Budget Coalition, a statewide coalition comprised of over 25 organizations committed to the health and well-being of children, Children's Defense Fund-Ohio works to advocate for a fair and just children's agenda that addresses the needs of the "whole child". We urge you to prioritize our children by protecting and investing in essential programs that promote child well-being. To this end, we ask that you consider the following as you finalize a budget for Ohio.

In **Critical Broadband Infrastructure**, all Ohioans must have access to reliable and affordable 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. The pandemic has revealed the weakness of our infrastructure that must be addressed. We support the House's version of the budget that critically invests \$190 million in broadband expansion and allows for local governments to serve Ohioans where private service providers have failed to build out broadband services.

In **Infant and Maternal Health**, Ohio can and must do better by our mothers and children. We must maintain the Senate's vital investment in 12-month postpartum coverage for new moms. However, it is critical that the language included in the House and Executive budget supporting comprehensive home visiting services to more children up to five years in age and their families be restored.

All children - regardless of income - should have access to **High-Quality Child Care**. A child's opportunity to gain the social, economic, cultural, and political capital necessary to flourish into adulthood is linked to their access to high quality educational experiences through childhood and into adulthood. To that end, we support expanded access for publicly funded childcare to 142%. However, the effective



derailment of the Step up to Quality improvement system included in the most recent version of the budget undermines our entire childcare system.

In K-12 Education, the Fair School Funding Plan, included in the House version of the budget, was developed in a transparent process over a three year period by educators, school treasurers, and school funding experts with ample opportunity for community input. This plan will address and fix Ohio's unconstitutional school funding system whereas the Senate plan will not. We have the opportunity, in this budget, to significantly improve equity among our schools and make Ohio a place where all students—regardless of zip code—can flourish educationally.

In Economic Stability, food and nutrition assistance and affordable, stable housing are essential for a prosperous Ohio. The pandemic has made it a struggle for Ohioans to keep food on the table. The SNAP program is critical infrastructure both to keep families fed, but also to stimulate the economy. Asset tests and change reporting for SNAP benefits will cause many families to be kicked off SNAP at a time when they are just beginning to get back on their feet. The Senate's inclusion of SB 17 provisions will increase hunger, discourage work, and ultimately, limit access to public benefits when Ohioans need them most.

The pandemic has also highlighted the critical need for a **safe, decent, affordable home** where families can stay healthy, achieve stability, and where children can learn. We cannot, at a time of increased housing insecurity and amid a severe affordable housing shortage as is, tax affordable housing developers in a way that undermines their ability to develop projects that serve our most marginalized families throughout the state. Such a provision threatens stable housing for so many families now and into our state's future.

With your dedication and commitment to children in this Budget, we can create a bright future for Ohio's children.

For Ohio's Children,

Tracy Nájera

Executive Director

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and Member of the Ohio Children's Budget Coalition