



Medicaid helps, but tax policies hurt poor

Saturday, January 24, 2015

Gov. John Kasich started his second term with an inaugural address that focused on lifting up the poor. This is a welcome message.

To be sure, Kasich deserves credit for implementing one of the core components of the Affordable Care Act. Since expanding Medicaid eligibility, more than 450,000 of the most vulnerable Ohioans now have access to health care.

Unfortunately, when it comes to helping poor, working- and middle-class families, this Kasich policy is the exception, not the rule.

According to a recent report by Policy Matters Ohio, the working poor in Ohio now pay more in taxes as a share of their income than do the wealthy. Those making over \$350,000 a year pay about 7 percent of their income to state and local taxes, while Ohioans making around \$50,000 pay nearly 11 percent.

This imbalance is largely because the governor and the state legislature have paid for income-tax cuts, which favor the wealthy, by reducing funding to communities and increasing the state sales tax.

Because the sales tax is regressive, high rates cost lower-income earners more.

In addition, legislative priorities in Columbus are weakening Ohio's public-education system and tilting the balance in favor of those who live in high-wealth districts.

Over the past four years, education spending as a share of the state budget has gone from 33 percent to just 28, according to the nonpartisan Ohio Legislative Service Commission. Local communities have seen their funding cut in half over the past four years. These cuts affect basic quality-of-life issues such as police and fire protection, trash collection and road repair.

Medicaid expansion is encouraging. But until there are fundamental changes in Kasich's broader policy agenda, his compassionate-conservative words don't match his actions.

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Original Article: <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/editorials/2015/01/24/1-medicaid-helps-but-tax-policies-hurt-poor.html>