

Last-minute amendments make big changes in Ohio Senate budget

Anti-abortion and school voucher proponents find a lot to like in the Senate version of the budget

June 5, 2013

By Jo Engles

The Senate's proposed budget leaves intact a controversial amendment that re-prioritizes federal dollars for family planning -- a move Planned Parenthood says would put it at the back of the line for that money. And it adds another controversial measure making it harder for abortion clinics to get the medical agreement they need with hospitals in order to operate.

Stephanie Kight with Planned Parenthood of Ohio says these changes are damaging and dangerous.

"They refuse access to providers around the state, the providers that women have relied on for many years for their reproductive health care," she says. "And they are dangerous because we need to have these transfer agreements with good, reliable hospitals throughout the state.

"Rather than focus on the budget and jobs, we have senators who are focused on reducing access and making health care more dangerous and difficult for women to get.

'A loud announcement'

Mike Gonadakis of Ohio Right to Life disagrees. He says his group is excited about these two proposals in the budget.

"What we are going to see here is no longer can taxpayer-funded hospitals be in the abortion business. What we have here is a loud announcement from the General Assembly, both in the House and Senate that Ohio is a pro-life state, and we have a pro-life governor and a pro-life government."

More public money for private schools

Another change in the budget angers public-school backers like Ron Papp of the Ohio Education Association. Papp says the Senate is shifting money to expand the school-voucher program.

"The changes that the Senate made expand the program to allow parents who make up to \$94,000 a year to receive a voucher to send their kids to private schools." The vouchers, which had been going to children who would otherwise be attending failing schools, will be open to all school district. Papp calls that misdirection.

"We should try to improve our public schools rather than siphoning off public dollars to send students to private schools.

But Sarah Peckhan with Ohio School Choice says that amendment is an excellent opportunity for all school-aged children.

"The proposed income-based scholarship will open up opportunities for families across the state who cannot provide private-school education for their children because of their income. Regardless of where they live, they will be eligible. And we have been hearing from families across the state who, for years, have been wanting and needing this type of option."

Good for the rich, bad for the middle class?

Those are just a couple of the measures in the Senate's proposed budget that are getting attention right now as senators prepare to vote on the budget.

Dale Butland of the left-leaning think tank Innovation Ohio hopes that as the budget continues through the legislative process, lawmakers make serious changes to it. He says the current plan does not help most Ohio families.

"Whether you look at their inadequate funding of schools and local government or their expansion of private-school vouchers for children of the wealthy or their so-called small business tax cut that gives 80 percent of the benefits to the top 5 percent, it's pretty clear that the Republican budget is good for the rich and it's very bad for the middle class.

But the Republican Sen. Scott Oelslager of Stark County says the Senate budget is focused on one thing – jobs.

He says it puts money into education at all levels so that Ohioans will be properly trained for jobs. And he says it provides tax breaks for small businesses that create jobs. He thinks that combination will, in the end, be good for all Ohioans.

Now that the Ohio Senate committee has approved the budget, the full Senate will vote on it

Audio:

<http://www.wksu.org/news/story/35810>