

July 16, 2020
Sent Electronically

Re: Help Ohio Recover from the Coronavirus and Recession

Dear Senator Portman,

As local elected officials and state representatives closest to the communities that we all serve, we write to share a frontline dispatch. The coronavirus has wreaked unprecedented havoc on the lives of Ohioans – disrupting our economy, our schools, our jobs, and our way of life.

While Ohioans are strong and resilient, it has been a long time since we faced such challenging circumstances. The latest state unemployment figure from May of 13.7% exceeds the highest we faced during the Great Recession. Countless small businesses are closing their doors. 800,000 Ohioans are at risk of eviction, according to the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project, and the patchwork of local and federal moratoria keeping them housed are set to expire within weeks. So severe are our coronavirus trendlines that Governor DeWine warned us all last night we are on track to follow hard-hit states Georgia, Florida, and Texas; already 3,000+ Ohioans have died and 9,000+ have been hospitalized, while we may only be in the second inning of this pandemic. Our children, especially those with special needs, have been set back academically by the necessity of school closures, and thousands of the teachers and school employees who educate them are poised to lose their livelihoods to senseless austerity.

Senator Portman, as an influential member of the Senate Finance Committee, you can do something about it. We urge you to fight for the U.S. Senate to pass the HEROES Act or a bold bill that includes substantially similar provisions including:

- **\$1 trillion in unrestricted state and local grants to replace lost revenues and continue public services**, which would result in about \$16 B each for the Ohio state government and for Ohio city, county, and local governments collectively. Already, 65,700 public sector workers have been laid off in Ohio since February. Anything less than \$1 trillion for state and local government will cause needless suffering. While Ohio [stands to lose](#) another 191,400 public and private sector jobs in the next 18 months, even a package that amounts to a mere \$500 B for states and cities will still trigger the loss of 93,900 Ohio jobs.
- **A 14-percentage point increase to the federal Medicaid match (FMAP)**. Amounting to \$4.3 B in Medicaid funding, this relief would ensure coverage of newly unemployed Americans needing Medicaid health services. The Urban Institute has projected that Ohio's Medicaid caseloads could increase by as much as 650,000, or 27% percent, through FY 2021.
- **At least \$200 billion to public K-12 including \$25 billion to Title I and IDEA**, resulting in \$3.2 billion for education in Ohio, including \$2.1 billion for public K-12 schools and \$949 million to public colleges and universities. The K-12 portion of these funds would save or restore the positions of 11,209 teachers, 2,352 teacher aides and 21,135 other workers.

- **\$50 billion to the Child Care and Development Block Grant.** This is an increase over the HEROES Act because when families cannot care for their children, the economy cannot recover. Closures and furloughs have devastated Ohio's childcare ecosystem, which could cause the permanent loss of 204,000 child care slots, almost half of our total supply of childcare capacity, as we've gone from about 9,000 providers in Ohio before the pandemic to now roughly 2,200 child care providers operating with the temporary Pandemic Child Care Provider license.
- **An expansion of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)'s paid family leave program** to private-sector employers, regardless of size, and extension to the end of 2021.

Research tells us what happens in families when jobs are lost and income disappears: suicide rises, student academic performance suffers, child abuse increases, skills and employability stagnate, life expectancy declines, and household savings dries up. Senator, every dollar spent now on these priorities is another Ohio child whose life continues a better trajectory. Unfortunately, we know the communities bearing the burden of these crises are the same ones that have barely recovered from the last recession: women-led households, low-income communities, and Black and Brown families.

We also urge you to sustain for another six months the Pandemic Unemployment Compensation income support program set to expire soon. As of late June, approximately 1,400,000 Ohioans, representing 24.3% of the state's February labor force, have filed unemployment insurance claims since the beginning of March. Of those, at least half a million are further relying on the \$600 weekly supplement. Studies [suggests](#) 100,000+ jobs will be lost over the next year if this boost expires. We are aware of your \$450 back-to-work proposal and we reject the strawman argument that Ohioans will choose temporary welfare over permanent work. This slur conveniently forgets that for many Ohioans, there simply is no stable and safe job to go back to, and moreover, rules do not permit a worker to refuse a reasonable job offer. That the jobs you would ask Ohioans to return to pay less than they made with the PUC boost is an indictment of how poorly we allow workers to be valued, not Ohioans' work ethic.

None of us knows when Ohio will return to "normal." But without robust, critical, and flexible assistance to states, cities, towns, schools and families, it never will. To survive and recover from this pandemic, safely reopen our schools and allow people to safely return to work to restore our economy, we have to maintain critical state and local services, such as law enforcement, education and healthcare. Time is running out to save these vital services and keep the everyday heroes in public service who are fighting on the front lines of this pandemic on the job. We urge you to fight for this much needed federal action.

Best,

Kristin Boggs

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