

Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE)
Platform Agenda
2024-25 State of Ohio Biennium Budget

Passed February 15, 2023

The following 2024-25 State of Ohio Biennium Budget Platform has been developed and approved by members of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE). Over 30 individuals and organizations met in November of 2022 to discuss and draft this document. The Platform reflects the Budget areas of most concern to low-income Ohioans as they focus on issues of daily survival, employment, public education, public transportation, human services, and a strong local government. Issues that surround the passing of a solid Biennium Budget that meets the needs of all Ohioans in a fair and equitable manner include the State's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and how to raise the income to implement the 2024-25 Budget.

The gigantic negative economic impact of the Pandemic will surface in the Budget debate on issues of unemployment, rental/mortgage assistance, health care, utility assistance and others. In addition, how the State will address these line items as well as others will make proposals on closing tax loopholes, the income tax and other revenue sources much more critical as the State moves forward. It cannot be business as usual as the Budget is debated. Policy makers must be proactive as they respond to the pandemic while building the State's capacity to continue to meet the needs of its citizens in a just and equitable way.

Diana King and Diane Howard
Co-Chairs of NOBLE

As we share the NOBLE platform with you, we feel that it is important that The State of Ohio establish an adequately funded evaluation program that will look at program delivery in all 88 counties. This evaluation should include ways in which services are provided, working from home versus working from the office, compensation, training, the impact of covid and other items that influence how successful a county is at providing health and human services. This evaluation must include the voices of consumers.

Budget Area: Revenue

- Tax benefits to increase the amount of revenue available to low-income families and individuals including but not limited to
 - Establishment of a Child Tax Credit
 - Add a 10% refundable option to the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), while retaining the 30% non-refundable option. Thus, taxpayers could utilize whichever option benefitted them the most.
- Ensure that the municipal income tax remains a viable source of funding for cities and villages. If the General Assembly should approve legislation or a lawsuit should require changes undercutting this tax, the state should make good on city revenue losses.
- The State needs additional revenue generation for the purpose of investing in Ohio's workforce, families, community services and maintaining crucial state services. Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE) advocates revenue generation in any of the following ways:

- o End the business income deduction, sometimes known as the LLC loophole. This deduction is a tax break that allows owners of pass-through entities like limited liability companies to pay no state income tax on up to \$250,000 in business income.
- o There should be no reduction in income tax rates or the establishment of a flat tax. We should reinstate the 7.5% tax rate for income over \$250,000.
- o Tax loopholes should be examined: Tax expenditures should have clearly identifiable purposes and expire if those objectives are not obtained.
- o There should be a re-establishment of a corporate income tax, which was repealed in 2005; corporate taxes should be strengthened to restore balance between individuals/families and corporations.
- o The CAT tax should be maintained at its current level.
- o The state should increase its severance tax on oil & gas companies so that it is comparable to other major producing states.

Budget Area: Employment

- Hire more wage theft investigators.

Budget Area: Housing

- Establish a community task force to broaden housing options for low-income households. This task force will make recommendations for the 2026-27 Biennium Budget.
- Create 1,500 housing units for those who require nearby supportive services (\$100 million): These permanent supportive housing (PSH) units would serve chronically homeless individuals with severe behavioral health challenges, homeless youth, and survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence through gap financing with Ohio’s housing tax credit programs.
- Create up to 5,000 affordable rental units by leveraging other federal resources (\$150 million): Rehab existing and develop new affordable rental units for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities by leveraging the 4% housing tax credit and Multifamily Bond programs.
- Fight infant mortality through investment in safe, welcoming homes (\$9 million): Expand the Healthy Beginnings at Home pilot for more families at risk of infant mortality in four additional counties.
- Rehabilitate existing housing to keep seniors and people with disabilities in their own homes (\$39 million over three years): Avoid institutional care by rehabilitating homes for low-income homeowners and expand home repair and accessibility modifications for seniors and people with disabilities through the Housing Assistance Grant Program.
- Homes to help ex-offenders overcome behavioral health issues (\$10 million): Expand the Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) initiative in five additional counties to help justice system-involved individuals reenter society and avoid recidivism.
- Increased funding for lead safe housing including for:
 - o assessment, abatement, and rehousing
- Ohio should take over enforcement of the Renovation, Repair, and Painting rule (RRP).
- Support the State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.
- Increase support for the Housing Trust Fund.

Budget Area: Transportation

- There should be a dedicated line item for paratransit services for the use of:

- o Free rides
- o A decrease reliance on contracted services
- Increased support for public transportation including paratransit or equivalent services in rural counties.
- \$150 million a year should be invested in public transit and related alternatives.
- There should be an increase in the use of general revenue funds for the funding of public transportation.
- A multi-modal development fund should be established within the ODOT budget with a dedicated funding source, whether that comes from issuing state bonds or from identifying a tax revenue base.

Budget Area: Local Government Fund

- State revenue sharing through the local government fund should be restored to its previous level of 3.68% of state funds.
 - o At minimum, there should be a permanent increase to the local government funding formula by 10% each year of the biennium.

Budget Area: Health & Human Services

A. TANF

● TANF SURPLUS

The State should use TANF surplus funds for:

- o Reducing the number of cases per customer service representative.
- o Operating a fully functional Ohio Benefits Program.

● CASH ASSISTANCE

- o Cash assistance should be extended to 5 years allowed by existing Federal law from 3 years.
- o Regarding exemptions, the state should create uniform procedures and training to reduce inconsistencies.
- o Funding should be increased to county departments of Job and Family Services to handle the increase in caseloads and to adequately provide services to consumers.
- o An increase in cash assistance to all eligible households by \$100/month to provide additional cash assistance to TANF families to help them meet their basic needs and afford additional pandemic-related expenses. The pandemic makes this even more critical.

● ADDITIONAL TANF

- o Ohio lawmakers should reverse the mandate that counties individually bear the risk of federal penalty if they do not meet federal TANF work requirement ratios because of the regional disparity in economic conditions across the state. Instead, the state should balance the work requirement ratio on a statewide basis, and take responsibility for it, lifting the threat of penalty from the counties.
- o The state should adopt the recommendations in the recently released Ohio Benefits User Experience Study.
 - For example:
 - Improve the Ohio Benefits Self-Service Portal using human-centered design principles. Ohio policymakers and agency administrators should hold technology vendors accountable to usability standards to ensure Ohioans have access to a

high-quality, mobile-friendly, and user-friendly website and online application platform that is also ADA accessible and includes the ability to submit pictures of required documents.

- o Allocate \$50 million from Ohio's TANF funds for one-time emergency assistance through the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency program. This could provide one-time payments of \$500 to 100,000 families with immediate, emergency needs.

B. Childcare

- To address inflation, eligibility for childcare assistance should be increased to 300% FPL and it should be maintained for families who lose eligibility for one full year after it has been established to assure stability and continuous educational programming for children. The services should be maintained when parents are in between jobs or when mothers go on maternity leave.

C. Kinship Care

- If the preferred option is to place children, whenever possible, in a kinship setting, then kinship care providers should receive equitable allowances when compared to those usually received by foster care providers. In all cases, these allowances should adequately meet the specific needs of providing care for the children in their care; this includes food, shelter, transportation, childcare, and other necessities.
- Support should be provided to counties for the purpose of family reunification.

D. Care for Older Populations and People with Disabilities

- The state should establish a match that draws down the maximum amount of dollars from the Older Americans Act in order to strengthen community based senior centers by increasing money allocations to local area offices on aging.
- Funding for Adult Protective Services should be increased to \$22.75 million for each year of the Biennium Budget.
- Additional money should be invested in nursing homes to support facilities.
- Additional support should be allocated for the expansion of the PACE program.
- Additional support should be allocated for assisted living.
- Additional support should be allocated for hospices, as well as for home health home and community-based services. Increased funding for hospices and community-based services must be made harmless from budget to budget. Additionally, the department needs to establish a watchdog program to guarantee that this is how the dollars are being spent.
- Increase support for adult day services.
- Invest in provider rates with the primary purpose of increasing behavioral health and direct care worker wages. The increased wages must be protected from budget to budget. The department needs to establish a watchdog program to guarantee that this is how the dollars are being spent. Caregivers and behavioral health workers should be paid at least \$20/hr. Additionally, the department needs to establish a watchdog program to guarantee that this is how the dollars are being spent.
- There should be new language requiring boards of developmental disabilities have at least one person eligible for services be appointed to the board.
- Support to increase the availability of universal changing tables in public spaces and business.
- Increased funding to support multi-system youth initiatives.

E. Healthcare & Medicaid

- Expand general Medicaid eligibility up to 300% FPL for families and children.
 - Exclude any mandatory work requirements.
- Allow for continuous Medicaid coverage for children up to six years old.
- Medicaid Optional services must be protected.
 - For example, dental, vision, mental health
- Continue to fund Ohio Free Clinics and federally qualified health centers at least at the level of current funding.
- Medicaid reimbursements should be provided for doula services and certification of midwives to practice in Ohio.
- Expand the type of evidence-based programs that are reimbursable under Help Me Grow.
- Fully implement Ohio RISE, Ohio Medicaid's program that provides comprehensive care for children with complex needs or multi-system youth. It is imperative that any remaining gaps in care and support are identified and addressed, with flexible state funding intact.
- The state should establish a Public Health Emergency (PHE) to extend Medicaid coverage to those who stand to lose eligibility.
- The inclusion of over-the-counter medication and supplies through Medicaid Managed Care plans should be supported.
- Additional funding for lead prevention including for:
 - Housing, soil, lead pipes, human infrastructure
- Prevention and remediation programs for all environmental problems that lead to health problems including, but not limited to, mold, mercury, air pollution both indoor and outdoor.

F. Food Assistance

- \$100 million per year should be given to The Ohio Association of Foodbanks for food and essential nonfood household items and capacity building.
- Provide a state supported supplemental SNAP benefit for seniors and persons with disabilities of at least \$150 per month.
- Provide Universal Free School Meals for all children and expand summer and out of school time meals with additional state funding.

Budget Area: Education

- Fully fund K-12 education equitably and sufficiently to ensure a great public school in every zip code. This can be done by fully funding the Cupp-Patterson School Funding Plan. Utilize voucher funds to accomplish this.
- Create a student loan ombudsman at the state level that will help students and Ohioans with student debt to navigate the complex system upon graduation and beyond.
- Fund extracurricular literacy programs, including digital & financial literacy. These programs should encompass not just young children but teens, adults, and seniors.
- Tuition increases for state funded college/higher education should be frozen at a rate no higher than 2% for the duration of the budget.
- There should be dedicated funding for the purpose of guaranteeing the availability of a licensed social worker at every public school in the state.
- Increase the number of school psychologists for K-12.
- Guarantee a social worker and school psychologist for each K-12 school.

Budget Area: Mental Health/Substance Abuse

- Improve quality and expand access to treatment.
- Enforce mental health and substance use disorder insurance parity.
- Support statewide prevention efforts.
- Invest in Behavioral health crisis services and integrated care delivery.
- Improve outcomes through recovery support and population health strategies.
- There should be additional funding dedicated to harm reduction. This includes, but is not limited to, syringe services programs, naloxone distribution, and fentanyl test strips.
- Increase the number of services for young adults 18-30.
- Increase the number of counselors in public colleges.
- Increase the use of diversion services for both misdemeanors and felonies including increased funding for alternative dockets.
- Create open access community crisis centers throughout the state.
- The state should exercise any power it has to support the creation of care response initiatives across the state. Utilize existing programs in Cincinnati and Columbus for reference.
- There should be universal access to all treatment programs regardless of race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender identity.