



Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force
Co-Chair Recommendations

November 16, 2023



Ohio Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force

To: Members of the General Assembly

From: Co-Chairs, Senator Tim Schaffer and Representative Scott Wiggam

Date: November 16, 2023

RE: Co-Chair Recommendations

Introduction

House Bill 110 of the 134th General Assembly created the Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force.¹ The task force was charged with reviewing the State Auditor's November 2020 audit, entitled "*Ohio's Medicaid Eligibility Determination Process*" and determining to what extent the recommendations included in the report were adopted by the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM).²

The task force was also statutorily tasked with examining various aspects of the state's public assistance programs, which included reviewing and recommending best practices in the following areas: (1) previous and existing welfare-to-workforce county-administered programs and their effectiveness in assisting individuals in returning to the workforce and achieving sustainable employment; (2) previous and existing fraud prevention efforts at the state and county levels in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Medicaid program, Ohio Works First (OWF), and publicly funded child care; (3) the prevention of benefit overpayments in SNAP, Medicaid, and publicly funded child care, both at the state and county levels; and (4) how using technology to process public assistance cases may create efficiencies and reduce errors.³

¹ FY 2022-FY 2023 biennial budget provision (Section 307.300, see page 2206, HB 110 text, as enrolled, <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-documents?id=GA134-HB-110>)

² State Auditor's Report on "Ohio's Medicaid Eligibility Determination Process," November 9, 2020, https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Reports/2020/Medicaid_Eligibility_117_Audit_Franklin_2020.pdf

³ FY 2022-FY 2023 biennial budget provision (Section 307.300, see page 2206, HB 110 text, as enrolled, <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-documents?id=GA134-HB-110>)

In addition, the task force reviewed child support enforcement compliance across public assistance benefit programs, as well as the feasibility of incorporating a photo identification to the SNAP benefit card as a means to deter fraudulent activity.⁴

Task Force Membership

The task force consisted of 15 members, including three members of the Ohio House of Representatives and three members of the Ohio Senate. Overall, the task force consisted of the following members:

House Appointments	Senate Appointments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative Kyle Koehler (R), Co-Chairman (134th General Assembly) • Representative Scott Wiggam (R), Co-Chairman (135th General Assembly) • Representative Willis Blackshear (D) • Representative Melanie Miller (R) • Joel Potts, Ohio Job and Family Services Directors’ Association • John Fisher, director of a county workforce development agency (Licking County) • Thomas Wolf, business owner employing fewer than 500 individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senator Tim Schaffer (R), Co-Chairman • Senator Bill Reineke (R) • Senator Teresa Fedor (D), 134th General Assembly • Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson (D), 134th and 135th General Assembly • Joe Patton, Allen County JFS Director • Randall Galbraith, director of a child support enforcement agency (Hancock County) • Joe Poelking, business owner employing fewer than 100 individuals

Administration
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Director Matt Damschroder
Ohio Department of Medicaid, Designees Megan Powell and Adam Showalter
Director of the Office of InnovateOhio, Designee Douglas Lumpkin

The task force convened six meetings, spanning from May 17, 2022 through April 18, 2023. According to the guiding budget provision, the task force is required to submit a report to the General Assembly regarding any recommendations concerning the topics listed above.

⁴ Ibid.

Overview

As part of its inquiry, the task force identified, evaluated, and gathered meaningful insights on how to improve the delivery of public benefits through a framework of proper controls and accountability measures. The task force invited testimony on improvements and approaches that would promote efficiency to the Ohio Benefits (OB) system, which allows residents to apply for benefits.

The task force reviewed the State Auditor's recommendations regarding eligibility determinations and submitted a progress report to legislative leaders on October 5, 2022.⁵ Specifically, the progress report noted various state improvements, along with ongoing challenges, with the existing OB system.

Additionally, the task force reviewed the work completed by the Task Force on Streamlining County Level Information Access. This task force made recommendations aimed at improving customer service by allowing County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS) offices to access information in the multiple Ohio Department of Job and Family Service (ODJFS) computer systems, which includes improving efficiencies and assisting caseworkers in the performance of their duties.⁶

Testimony was provided to the task force meetings by staff of ODM, ODJFS, the State Auditor's office, as well as CDJFS directors, including workforce and child support enforcement officials. Their presentations afforded the opportunity for the task force to assess where gaps exist and where changes can be made to address processing errors, and fraud and abuse in the distribution of public benefits.

From the information presented to the task force, and the information available to the co-chairs at the time of the taskforce meetings, it is apparent that progress that has been made to address the issues identified by the task force during public hearings. Yet, significant additional focus is needed to ensure the system is accurate, efficient, and effective in meeting the needs of the state's residents while striving to achieve zero waste to Ohio's residents.

Co-Chair Recommendations

As co-chairs of the Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force, we respectfully submit a series of recommendations to the General Assembly for consideration supported by presentations and materials provided and presented to the taskforce.

⁵ Review of the State Auditor's Report on the Recommendations of Ohio's Eligibility Determination Process, October 2, 2022, <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/publications/monthly-agency-reports/2022/monthly-agency-report-november-2022>

⁶ Task Force on Streamlining County Level Information Access, Final Report issued on March 10, 2023, <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/publications/monthly-agency-reports/2023/monthly-agency-report-april-2023>

As co-chairs of the Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force, we look forward to continuing to work and collaborate with members of the General Assembly, the Administration, local government officials, and stakeholders to ensure fiscal responsibility, transparency, and accountability in the delivery of public assistance benefits.

The co-chair recommendations encompass three areas of interest, which include the Ohio Benefits system, workforce, and SNAP. Certain provisions within the recommendations may require legislative approval.

Ohio Benefits System

While progress has been made in making enhancements to the Ohio Benefits (OB) system, it is still lacking in efficiency. Particularly, the enhancements, while significantly improved, have not sufficiently reduced the volume of alerts, which are far too frequent to allow for caseworker accuracy. It is imperative that efforts continue in the following areas:

- Redesign the alert process to be more effective and efficient, including a centralized evaluation of alert activity to prioritize the alerts. Duplicative alerts require the county worker to open each alert separately to clear it out of the system.
- Prioritize implementing program changes in the OB system that directly impact the accuracy of eligibility determinations.
- Formalize OB interagency agreements to include the roles and responsibilities of each agency to achieve program compliance.
- Implement a data governance structure designed to ensure data quality and reliability for all users.

Workforce

- Track caseworker changes to ensure that eligibility determinations are compliant with state and federal law, as well as accuracy of data entry. Additional benefits of tracking caseworker changes include identifying trends in casework processing and providing technical assistance to caseworkers.
- Reorient caseworker focus on positive outcomes for beneficiaries, including reducing enrollee numbers by helping with job placement and connecting individuals to services in the community that result in self-sufficiency.
- Develop a plan to reduce number of enrollees on public benefits by helping individuals secure long term and sustainable jobs.

- Provide continued investment in thoughtful technology integration and add-ons to the OB system that will assist caseworkers in determining eligibility in a more streamlined manner, while reducing errors.
- Identify additional efficiencies in delivering public benefits through more effective coordination between ODJFS, ODM, and CDJFS.
- Ensure individuals processing presumptive-eligibility applications are receiving the proper training to reduce errors in this process, therefore, reducing the numbers of individuals not eligible for Medicaid that benefit from the program.

SNAP

- In order to reduce fraud in the SNAP program, limit the number of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card replacements in a calendar year, as well as establish a policy on limiting high balance cards, and other fraud metrics, for EBT cards.
- Promote higher rates of participation in employment and training activities, as well as examining measures that will accelerate individuals accepting job offers.
- Reevaluate the state's waivers and waiver policy to reduce and ensure that there is a limited number of exemptions from the federal government.
- Align applications for benefits with applicable court orders.
- Review waivers and state plan amendments to ensure intent is aligned with the goals of maximizing state funds and promoting transition services and job placement. Provide increased public transparency regarding these items.
- Use additional tools and enhancements to promote accountability in the distribution of benefits.
- Continue to evaluate optional anti-fraud measures such as photo identification

Appendix

- Task Force Materials from May 17, 2022 through April 18, 2023