



2019

ANNUAL REPORT



OPLC
Ohio Poverty Law Center



1 IN 7

**OHIOANS
LIVES IN
POVERTY.**

OUR MISSION

The Ohio Poverty Law Center's mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working and raising their families in poverty.

The **Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC)**, under the umbrella of Ohio State Legal Services Association, works to reduce poverty and increase justice by expanding the legal rights of low-income Ohioans. The mission is no small task, but OPLC is up to the challenge. Working with, and on behalf of, legal aid practitioners and clients across the state, OPLC brings their voices to state policymakers in the legislature and administration.

Nearly 14 percent of Ohioans live in poverty and every day government makes decisions that impact their ability to raise and feed their children, find access to health care and addiction treatment, and secure and maintain gainful employment.

In this report, you will see how OPLC improves the lives of low-income Ohioans through advocacy and information sharing. From supporting policies that promote family stability and ensure access to health care to removing barriers to employment, OPLC has an ambitious agenda. In 2019, that meant advocating for programs in the state budget, educating employers on fair chance hiring, and helping Ohioans reinstate their driver's licenses.

Please continue to support OPLC to help our state develop sound public policies that support Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.



In appreciation of your support,

Jonathan W. Marshall
Chair
OPLC Board of Managers

OPLC STAFF Susan Jagers, director • Graham Bowman • Tim Johnson • Megan O'Dell

BOARD OF MANAGERS

Jonathan W. Marshall, Chair
Attorney at Law

Mary Asbury
Executive Director
Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

Myia Batie
Coordinator of Policy and Programs
Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing

Ian Beniston
Executive Director
*Youngstown Neighborhood
Development Corporation*

Jim Daniels
Director
Southeastern Ohio Legal Services

Margaret Hulbert
Vice President
United Way of Greater Cincinnati, retired

Heather Hall
Advocacy Director
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality

Steven McGarrity
Executive Director
Community Legal Aid Services, Inc.

Tom Mlakar
Deputy Director for Advocacy
Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

Phil Moots
Attorney at Law
*Newhouse, Prophater, Kolman
& Hogan, LLC*

Rev. Donald L. Perryman
President, United Pastors for Social
Empowerment
Center of Hope Baptist Church

Ronald J. Rees
Executive Director
*Corporation for Ohio Appalachian
Development*

Zach Schiller
Research Director
Policy Matters Ohio

Kyle Strickland
Senior Legal Analyst
*Kirwan Institute for the Study
of Race and Ethnicity*

Gina Wilt
Advocacy Director
COHHIO

Kathleen McGarvey – staff
Executive Director
Ohio State Legal Services Association

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT FROM THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS



DONORS

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

Sandra J. Anderson
Mary Asbury and Bob Newman
Judy Bird
Judge William David Branstool
Richard and Betty Brooks
Joseph Caligiuri
Carolyn Carter
Linda I. Cook and Paul Carpenter
John Corlett
James M. and Margaret Daniels
Janet L. Flory
Jerry Friedman
Jane Frye
Rita Sue Fuchsman
Heather Hall
Connie Hammond
Stephanie Harris
Judge William and Magistrate Shelly Harsha
Margaret Hulbert
Susan Jagers
John and Mary Keifer
Eugene and Nancy King

Cathy Levine
Jonathan W. Marshall
Steven McGarrity
Kathleen McGarvey and Edward Forman
Susan B. McGarvey
Tom Mlakar
Philip R. Moots
Judge Edward Emmett O'Farrell
Ohio Assn. of Community Action Agencies
Ohio Capital Impact Corporation
Col Owens
Reverend Donald L. Perryman
Kristen Peters
Ronald J. Rees
Lisa and Scott Reisz
Pari Sabety and Mark Shanahan
Zachary Schiller
Michael Smalz and Jane Ferrier
Judge John and Mrs. Kathleen Solovan
John R. Stevenson
Steven Wagner
Thomas Weeks and Elizabeth Copley
Gina Wilt



ADVOCATING FOR FUNDS TO HELP LOW-INCOME OHIOANS IN THE STATE'S BUDGET

Ohio's biennial operating budget bill enacts policy and appropriates funds for programs that impact all Ohioans, and is especially important for low-income Ohioans. The \$70 billion budget includes substantial investments in health care, programs to reduce lead exposure, student wellness funding weighted toward school districts with high poverty rates, and public children's services to expand resources for foster care and kinship care. In addition, the state Earned Income Tax Credit - a benefit for low-wage earners - was expanded.

OPLC and its partners advocated for many of these investments to improve access to health care and stabilize families. Our advocacy, which included testifying before the legislature, providing written comments on proposed legislation and bringing the stories of legal aid clients to the statehouse, helped direct funds to support low-income Ohioans.

*OPLC Staff Attorney Graham Bowman testifies
on behalf of the budget.*

THE STATE BUDGET THAT PASSED IN 2019 INCLUDES:



Increased investments for lead abatement and services for children with lead poisoning

\$675M

In new funding for student wellness targeted to districts with high poverty rates



An increase in county recording fees earmarked to address affordable housing and homelessness

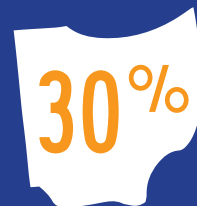
\$100M

Additional dollars for children's service agencies to help with issues related to the opioid crisis

\$47M

In new funding to support Kinship Care

The state
Earned Income Tax Credit
was increased to



The EITC helps lift families out of poverty by supplementing the earnings of low-wage workers and by rewarding work.



THE ABCs OF CQEs: ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

One in six Ohioans has a criminal record, making it difficult for them to find gainful employment. Currently, there are more than 850 barriers created in law or through rules that prevent a person with a criminal record from holding certain jobs or occupational licenses.

Common Pleas judges can grant individuals with past convictions a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE) to remove these barriers to employment. Studies show that having a CQE increases the holder's earning potential.

In order to educate employers about how CQEs could expand their pools of potential employees, OPLC worked with community partners to form a new coalition. SCORE Ohio (Second Chance Opportunities for Restorative Employment) held a series of forums and reached more than 100 employers. This employer training also enhanced OPLC's outreach to potential applicants. The number of CQE holders increased in 2019 to 1,300—an increase of more than 200—with an additional 2,200 applications in process.

Recognizing that the application process was challenging, and in some counties, unaffordable for low-income individuals, OPLC successfully advocated for changes to streamline the application process, including capping the filing fee at \$50.

Photos at left:

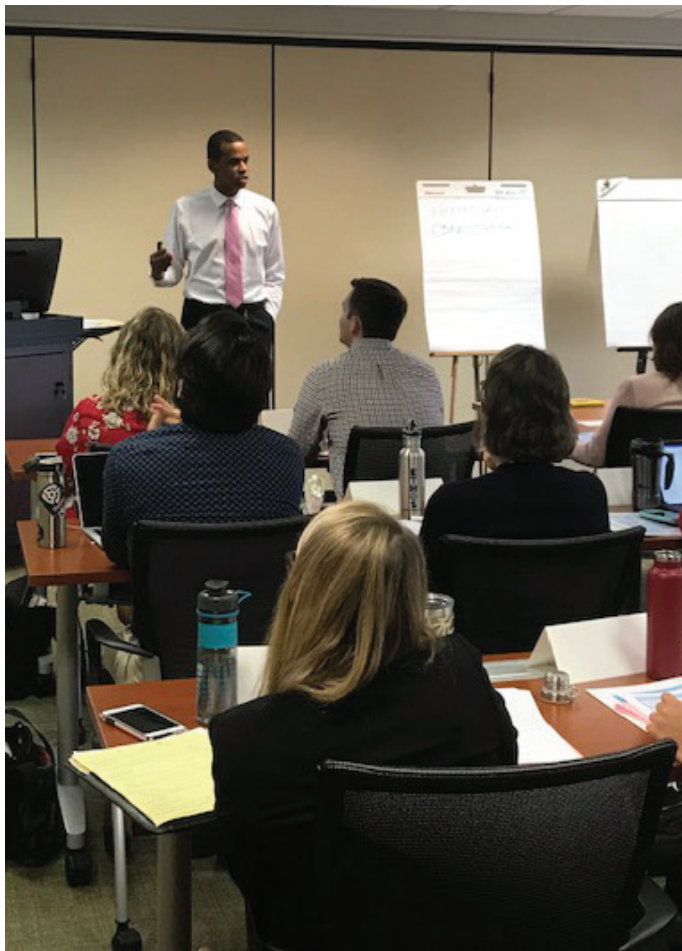
Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted with OPLC Staff Attorney Megan O'Dell at a SCORE Ohio event.

CQE holders answer questions during a SCORE Ohio panel discussion.

OPLC Staff Attorney Megan O'Dell (center) joins attorneys from the Legal Aid Society of Columbus for a local radio show promoting National Expungement Week.



Driver's license clinics like this one in Newark, Ohio, helped thousands of Ohioans benefit from the state's amnesty initiative.

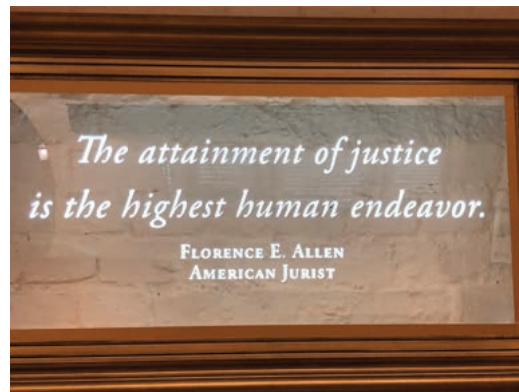


OPLC INCREASES REACH BY TRAINING OTHER ADVOCATES

With the support of the Ohio State Bar Foundation, OPLC provided a hands-on, interactive advocacy training for 24 legal aid attorneys. From the ins and outs of the state budget and tips on reading legislation to an insider's perspective on rulemaking, a variety of sessions filled the two-day agenda. Participants were put to the test with hands-on work culminating in a mock legislative hearing. The training gave attorneys additional information and skills to be the best advocates and voices for their clients. Attendees gave the training high marks and we plan to provide this opportunity again.

(At left) OPLC Policy Advocate Tim Johnson presents during OPLC's advocacy training.

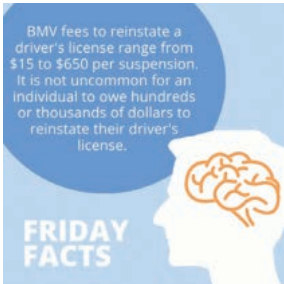
(At right) A press conference at the Ohio Statehouse announcing the release of the Moving Forward report resulted in lots of news coverage.





FOCUS ON OUTREACH INCLUDES INCREASED MEDIA PRESENCE

In an effort to increase engagement among young professionals and spread awareness of our work, OPLC added an Instagram account. We developed a series of templates–Watchful Wednesday and Friday Facts–designed to educate followers about important bills pending in the legislature and share details about the challenges facing low-income Ohioans. We also integrated media outreach in our advocacy efforts to increase support among the public and decisionmakers.



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
@OHIOPOVERTYLAW





1108 City Park Ave.
Suite 200
Columbus, OH 43206

614.827.0549
ohiopovertylawcenter.org