The Ohio Poverty Law Center’s mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of all Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.
Founded in 1966 as part of the Ohio State Legal Services Association, Ohio Poverty Law Center’s (OPLC) role has evolved over time. Having served as a legal aid lawyer beginning in the 1970’s, I vividly remember several court challenges devoted to securing basic constitutional and economic rights for our clients. OSLSA fought for justice from Ohio courts, public institutions and bureaucracies as well as recognition and relief from the Ohio legislature. Ohio’s legal aid programs learned not only how to use the law to defend clients’ interests but to create new legislation that addressed their needs.

Today, OPLC is recognized at the statehouse as a resource for information and an advocate for policies that improve the lives of Ohioans who live in poverty.

With nearly 15 percent of Ohioans living in poverty, it is critical that they are represented at the statehouse and administrative agencies by dedicated professionals who understand the issues and the process. OPLC was fortunate to have long time devoted attorneys, Linda Cook and Mike Smalz, work tirelessly for decades on behalf of low-income Ohioans. These advocates retired in 2017. We also experienced a change in leadership with OPLC director Janet Hales leaving to head one of the state’s legal aid programs.

OPLC’s tradition of excellence will be carried on by the newly hired director Susan Jagers who brings to OPLC more than 25 years of policy and advocacy experience. She joins staff attorney Graham Bowman, and Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation Justice for All Fellow Patrick Higgins.

Some of OPLC’s 2017 successes on behalf of Ohio’s poor are highlighted in this report. With a new team in place, OPLC is poised for future success. Please continue to support OPLC as a way to help our state develop sound public policies promoting opportunity and justice for all our citizens regardless of where they may live or the wealth each may possess.

We appreciate your support,

Jonathan W. Marshall
Chair
OPLC Board of Managers
**WHAT WE’VE DONE**

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The results of the Center’s work increase access to health care, stabilize families, and expand justice and opportunity.

**Access to Health Care**
OPLC and its coalition partners supported the continuation of Medicaid coverage to low-income adults up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, $16,753 for an individual. The expansion of Medicaid to cover these Ohioans has dramatically reduced barriers to healthcare. According the Ohio Department of Medicaid, there has been a **56% reduction in the uninsured rate among low-income Ohio adults**. Nearly 9 in 10 of the new Medicaid enrollees had no health insurance at the time of enrollment.

**Family Stability**
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program has an Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) requirement. Federal funds are available to finance SNAP E&T programming. However, Ohio was missing out on a portion of the available funding for local non-profits that provide these kinds of programs. OPLC worked to have language included in Ohio’s two-year budget bill to require the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to collaborate with the Department of Education to overhaul SNAP E&T in order to draw down additional funding. OPLC followed up on this success to bring together non-profits, community colleges, and community leaders in the Montgomery County area to identify and work with a nonprofit to develop a SNAP E&T program that could serve as a model for policymakers for how to successfully draw down additional federal funding to pay for high quality job training programs.

OPLC extended its advocacy to the federal level by working on the Lead Safe Housing for Kids Act, which requires that all federally assisted affordable housing be tested for lead before being rented to a household with children under age six. OPLC organized Ohio housing advocates to encourage Senator Rob Portman to co-sponsor the legislation. As a result, Senator Portman signed on as an early co-sponsor of the legislation giving the bill bipartisan support and OPLC was quoted in his press release about the bill.

Nearly **9 in 10** of the new **Medicaid enrollees** had no health insurance at the time of enrollment.

The continued coverage as provided in Ohio’s two-year state budget will increase access to health care and positive health outcomes. After just two years of expanded eligibility, **48% of the new enrollees reported improvements in their health**.
Expand Justice and Opportunity

Employers often say they cannot find qualified workers. Many Ohioans have been excluded by over-restrictive criminal record-based barriers. Certificates of Qualification for Employment (CQEs) increase the likelihood that people with criminal records will be considered for jobs, licensing, and trade certification. The state’s two-year budget included language that will make the CQE petition process more usable for individuals by removing a technical and confusing step in the petition process, expanding eligibility to more jobseekers, and designating rulemaking authority to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to create criteria for shortening a person’s wait time for submitting a CQE petition. Because one in six Ohioans has some sort of conviction record, these changes can help more than 1.9 million people in Ohio, many of whom are not able to get jobs in well-paying fields that require licensing or certification. OPLC continues to work with state agencies, partners, and employers to ensure that the changes are implemented and that Ohioans have greater access to the petition process.

Amber McCullough testified alongside the Ohio Poverty Law Center before the Ohio Department of Medicaid about her struggle to obtain specialized transportation services for her 2-year-old daughter.

Ms. McCullough’s daughter is wheelchair bound and requires a wheelchair accessible van to transport her to and from appointments. Ms. McCullough had to rely on the fire department countless times to take her daughter to her doctor’s visits after being unable to obtain appropriate transportation through the Medicaid program.

Ms. McCullough’s experience is common for families who need services that are not traditionally covered by Medicaid. Ms. McCullough and the Ohio Poverty Law Center testified on proposed rule changes to the “Healthcheck” program that provides screening, diagnosis, and treatment services (EPSDT) to children enrolled in Medicaid.

OPLC will continue its work on issues to expand access to health care, stabilize families, and expand opportunity and justice with the state agencies and the General Assembly through testimony, one-on-one meetings and ensuring the voice of the most vulnerable Ohioans are heard at the statehouse.

With 2018 being an election year, we will have an opportunity to introduce OPLC and important issues to candidates as they campaign.

We will work to raise the visibility of our issues through media outreach and increased social media presence. Make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter to stay up to date on our work and issues.
OUR TEAM

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Susan Jagers, Director

OPLC STAFF

Susan joined the Ohio Poverty Law Center as its Director in February 2018 after 10 years as a government affairs and communications consultant. As a consultant, she helped clients develop messages and strategies to successfully move their issues at the Ohio Statehouse. Susan served as director of the government relations department of a large Ohio nonprofit and was the co-chair of the successful 2006 SmokeFreeOhio campaign. She received her law degree in 1993 from Case Western Reserve University School of Law.

Graham Bowman, Staff Attorney

Graham joined the Ohio Poverty Law Center in June 2017 after working for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) for four years. At CCH, he organized legal clinics for homeless youth at shelters, health clinics, and high schools throughout Chicago and successfully advocated for various changes to state law and policy regarding the rights of homeless youth to apply for public benefits and access health care. He received his law degree from Loyola University of Chicago School of Law in 2013 with certificates in public interest and health law.

Patrick Higgins, OLAF Justice for All Fellow

Patrick joined the Ohio Poverty Law Center in September 2016 as an Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation Justice for All Fellow. He works on workforce issues and addresses legal barriers to employment, particularly those related to criminal records. Patrick received his law degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 2016 where he was an Arthur Russell Morgan Fellow in Human Rights, a position within the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights, serving as the Senior Articles Editor with Portfolio for the Human Rights Quarterly.
Thank you for your generous support

We would like to thank our Friends of OPLC who generously donated in 2017.

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