

2019 Positions and issues

Our region suffers from a lack of many essential services. The lack of affordable transportation, childcare, internet access are just a few of those very deficits of services for low income families. This is greatly exacerbated by the increase in low wage jobs that often have variable working hours. This challenge is more severe in communities like ours in which the available jobs often require a long commute and non-traditional working hours. The reality is that the economics of many low income workers is overwhelming. The greatest issue that impacts all the other sectors is the opioid epidemic. Local municipalities and non-profits lack the resources to provide criminal justice services, prevention/treatment and other needed intervention resources.

Despite these challenges the municipalities in Southeast Ohio have managed to improve local infrastructure through ARC, CDBG and OPWC funding. These communities have also championed innovative approaches to dealing with opiate addiction, prevention and treatment. The Mayor's Partnership has been a strong advocate for sharing information, suggesting best practices and providing support between the communities in the MPP. The Mayor's Partnership has provided information and training in USDA Housing programs, EPA standards and Asset Management, Water and Wastewater funding and requirements, Fire safety and First Responder programs and a myriad of other topics relevant to the needs of Mayors and Councils in Southeast Ohio.

**Position One: The MPP opposes the financial burden created by State audit requirements**

Small, rural communities lack trained staff that can manage the requirements of the State Auditor and the UAN (Unified Accounting Network) system. Municipalities often get "red flagged" for matters that present no danger to the funds provided through the appropriation of tax revenues. When communities get assigned to a "high risk pool" their audit costs can increase by anywhere from 300% to 800% and this presents a substantial burden on the finances of the municipality. In many cases, these communities participate in the "Ohio Treasurer's Checkbook" which is a mechanism for transparency in which communities voluntary participate. The MPP believes that the state should provide auditing services not through fees, but a line item for just such a purpose. We would also encourage a significant expansion of training opportunities provided through the Auditors offices.

**Position Two: Changing the access of CDBG Funds to an annual disbursement with matching support from the State of Ohio**

Access to CDBG funds for municipalities is available in two year cycles and while the amounts for funding would not increase, the chance to access funding annually would help communities. Also, we recommend that Ohio provide matching dollars to help communities achieve their match requirements as well as provided increased funding for necessary infrastructure projects.

### **Position Three: The expansion of Broadband access into the MPP region**

The MPP has taken a strong stance in support of bringing Broadband access to rural Ohio. The MPP believes that the state and federal government will need to play an active role in policy and funding to make this a reality. As stated in the article "Reaching Rural America with Broadband, by Sharon Strover (January 2017), "The policy debates in Washington provide the U.S. with the opportunity to choose to provide equal access to high-speed internet all across the country, or to relegate rural users to their smartphones, library parking lots and slow home connections. Real high-speed internet could change the lives of rural Americans: The FCC itself has reported that people use fixed broadband differently, and get more benefits from it than mobile data.

Fundamentally, it is a question of values. In the 1930s and '40s, the public sentiment was that the nation would be better off if everyone had reasonably comparable electricity and telephone service. As a result, the federal government established a system of loans and grants to ensure universal access to those key utilities. To help, the FCC set up a system to charge businesses and urban customers slightly higher fees to subsidize the higher costs associated with bringing phone lines to rural areas."

### **Position Four: Restoration of Local Government Funds**

In December of 2016 the MPP sent a resolution to Governor Kasich requesting the restoration of LGF to the 2012 levels. As stated in the letter, "We, the members of the Mayor's Partnership for Progress, a collaboration of Mayors in 12 Counties in Southeast Ohio, write to you seeking the restoration of the Local Government Funds to pre-2012 levels. We understand the desire of the State of Ohio to close the gap on an \$8,000,000,000 deficit that existed prior to 2012, but feel your assessment of local capacity was erroneous. Some communities may have been inefficient and could find savings through shared services, but in our region, we have shared services (formally and informally) for decades. We have also been skilled at frugality for years and years. We rely on volunteers to complete many tasks that would be done by paid employees in other municipalities. These tasks include park maintenance, building repairs, cleaning services, clearing brush, building playground equipment and many other items."

### **Position Five: Continued support for Medicaid expansion and regional transportation options**

The MPP supports the continued expansion of Medicaid to our region. The regional economy is very dependent on these dollars and their economic impact for our counties. The expansion also presents one of the few hopes for services dealing with the opioid epidemic. Also, the MPP opposes Ohio's attempts to find one central vendor for Medicaid Non-Emergency Transportation services.

As stated in our position paper of November 2017, "In looking at the NET SFY expenditures for 2017 and dividing that number by the number of statewide Medicaid recipients for May of that year ( \$75277703/ 3092953 ) the average NET expenditure per recipient is \$24. A similar

comparison for the MPP counties shows an average NET expenditure of \$69 with a high of \$182 for Gallia County. On the other hand the metro counties have much lower average costs. Cuyahoga \$8, Franklin \$7, Hamilton \$38, Lucas \$26, Montgomery \$22. The MPP region currently spends about \$12 million on NET through the counties. If our share was reduced to the average capitated rate of \$24, our share would only be about \$4 million.

It's not just the money. Our people are much more dependent on this service. The expansion of Medicaid has also brought resources to deal with the growing addiction issue. Their effectiveness will be challenged if patients can't get to treatment. Many of our few public transit systems in the area are dependent on these funds as well. Severe cuts may very well jeopardize their viability.

### **Position Six: Request for \$13,000,000 in unspent TANF funds for use in MPP region**

The TANF program is intended to meet the basic needs of low income families. Reductions in this program have left many families in our communities in challenging situations. At the same time, Ohio has amassed an unspent balance of TANF funds of over \$600 million. As written in our request to the ODJFS, "We would propose two TANF funded programs. First would be a subsidy for the distribution of non-food assistance to low income families with children in the MPP area. Specifically, this could be arranged and provided through the existing food bank and food pantry network and coordinated through the Foodbank Association. Non-food items could be included in food boxes that are currently distributed to families with children. The estimated annual cost in TANF funds would be \$4 million.

The second program would be a TANF fund for a onetime payment of water and sewer services. These payments of \$500 would be to the accounts of low-income families with children in the household. DJFS (Dept. of Job and Family Services) offices currently determine eligibility for a wide range of TANF funded services and would do so with this program as well. Each county in the MPP service area would receive an allocation of funds for payment to local water systems from an MPP regional allocation of \$9 million.

These funds would only replace a small portion of the overall loss of benefits from cuts in the cash assistance and SNAP programs. TANF funds are appropriated to help poor families.

Our kids depend upon the adults to make the correct decisions and accept responsibility for the kids who live in a disadvantaged area. Now is our chance to step up to that responsibility.