Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2015

The Honorable Secretary Sylvia Burwell
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell,

As members of Ohio's congressional delegation, we are writing to request your full and fair consideration of the State of Ohio's waiver application for relief from federal rules in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that can prevent recipients from finding meaningful long-term employment.

To help Ohioans move into sustainable employment, the state is integrating the Ohio Works First (TANF) program under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This program will create a comprehensive case management and employment system. The state is seeking to strengthen TANF work requirements by measuring activities that lead to employment and will continue to require TANF recipients to engage in work-related activities for the federally-required minimum number of hours. Flexibility under certain rules will allow the state to align performance metrics between programs and base success on improvements in job entry, job retention, earnings, and credential attainment for low-income Ohioans.

Certain federal rules governing TANF can make it difficult to customize case management based on an individual's needs and hinder recipient's ability to move into work and long-term stability. Specifically, Ohio's waiver requests the following:

- Remove the distinction between "core" and "non-core" hours.
- Increase the vocational education training time limit from 12 to 36 months.
- Increase the job search and job readiness time limit from six to 12 weeks, and remove the four consecutive week limit.
- Remove the 16 hour monthly cap (but maintain the 80 hour annual cap) on good cause hours credited toward work participation.

There are a number of bills under consideration by Congress to reauthorize the TANF program, and several of those bills propose to make the changes Ohio is requesting. However, Ohio would like to move forward quickly with a state program recently signed into law in order to move more low-income Ohioans to work and long-term stability.

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Guidance concerning TANF waivers issued by the Administration for Children and Families encourages states to test innovative strategies and to find more effective mechanisms for helping needy families succeed in employment.[1] As a county-administered state, with 88 counties representing urban, rural, and suburban communities, Ohio is a perfect laboratory for testing a new approach to the challenges facing low-income and unemployed individuals.

We stand ready to assist our state and encourage you to approve Ohio's application. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

[1]TANF-ACF-IM-2012-03, "Guidance concerning waiver and expenditure authority under Section 1115."