



**Ohio Association of
Community Action Agencies**

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September 17, 2015

PRESS CONFERENCE: Anti-Poverty Groups Respond to New Ohio Poverty Data

**Philip E. Cole, Executive Director
Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA)**

Good afternoon. I am Phil Cole, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA). The Association represents Ohio's fifty community action agencies which cover all of Ohio's 88 counties. Last year we served over 800,000 individuals with a variety of programs designed to help them escape the evils of poverty.

As you know from the previous speakers, the national poverty rate reported today is over 15%. In late November, OACAA will be releasing an updated Self-Sufficiency Standard and I imagine we will be telling you that the real rate of poverty—the rate at which an individual or family can survive without outside public or private assistance—is higher than that.

You have heard this afternoon about the need for affordable housing, an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, stronger food programs and the rest. We need to ask: Is this enough and is this all we can do?

In this nation, we did not always have big numbers of homeless people. We did not always have big numbers of people suffering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. In this nation, we did not always have stagnant wages, nor did we often have food pantries struggling for enough supply to meet demand.

As we know from other recessions, when a recession begins, Ohio falls into them more quickly, and when they end, Ohio comes out more slowly. It is the nature of Ohio's economy that this occurs. However, I believe that we are taking the right steps in Ohio. Governor Kasich has brought attention to the problems of poverty with Medicaid expansion, the passage and then expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, he is doing more with workforce development, tax cuts for low-income workers, and other things. We salute him for that though more needs to be done.

While we need to solidify the safety net with the tools discussed today. We must challenge the problems of poverty, not just piecemeal but as a whole. We need to create real, long-term opportunities for people. Poverty is an enormous problem with multiple tentacles, and the longer we wait, the more those problems multiply—poor education leads to a less qualified workforce, hunger leads to difficulty in learning, drug addiction leads to multiple problems for individuals and families, and so forth.

When speaking about the promises of democracy, Martin Luther King spoke of “the fierce urgency of now” and that phrase applies to the need to solve poverty today. It is urgent that we deal with all of the problems now because if we do not they will only continue to multiply and grow.

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President John Kennedy reminded us that the problems created by us can be solved by us. And he was right, as long as we do not wait too long. Ohio must go for every dollar possible for SNAP. Ohio must continue to strengthen our workforce, deal with the lack of affordable housing, make the EITC refundable, multiply our addiction recovery services, and we must have a strong education system that teaches entrepreneurship and financial management.

If we take on all the issues of poverty now, it will take several years before we see the change. But, that does not mean we should not do it. It means only that continuing to delay puts the solution even farther off into the future.

The time to solve poverty is now. Let's work together and get it done.

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Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other. Community Action Agencies work to alleviate poverty and empower low-income families in their communities. The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies represents 50 agencies around the state serving the needs of low-income people in all of Ohio's 88 counties. CAAs provide education and training, emergency services, and other assistance programs to over 800,000 Ohioans annually.