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### **For Immediate Release**

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## **News Release**

Over the past 10 years, Ohio has slashed the budgets of programs to help poor people numerous times. State leaders have slowly but surely picked apart the programs and services that were intended to help poor families meet their basic needs and give them the opportunity to overcome their circumstances.

In Athens County, these cuts have been severe. We have lost millions of dollars in funding and numerous programs have been eliminated or drastically scaled back. As a result, we are seeing more families who have to double or triple up in housing, more people who must rely on food pantries and more families struggling to pay their utilities. We are also seeing few people with access to phones or transportation and fewer programs for children, the elderly or disabled.

While these cuts have resulted in direct financial losses for low-income families, they have also had numerous other impacts on the community. For low-income families, the cuts have also meant the loss of essential services, healthcare or educational opportunities. The cuts have also resulted in a loss of jobs in the community and contributed to the reduction of economic activity in the county.

Athens County is not only one of the poorest counties in the state, it is also one of the highest in dependence on public dollars to fund the economy. Further cuts in public funding for poverty programs, education, healthcare or corrections will have a magnified impact on our community. This is not the time to be granting tax cuts to the wealthy while making even more cuts to those most in need.

Already in Athens County, 30% of the people (more than 19,000) live below the federal poverty limit, and 16.2% of Athens County residents live below 50% of the federal poverty level, which for a family of four is an annual income of \$11,025.

In addition, the number of people receiving food and cash assistance each month is rising, and one out of every six Athens County residents receives Food Assistance benefits. Local food pantries are also seeing more people than ever standing in lines for food, and their resources are stretched to the limit.

Here is a listing of the impacts of a few of the budget cuts in the last 10 years:

**In 2001**, Athens County Job and Family Services (ACJFS) lost \$9 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funding. That massive budget cut meant that ACJFS had to eliminate 30 jobs (which included 24 layoffs) and reduce or eliminate funding to 30 programs in the county. The program cuts included:

- Kids on Campus (which had to cut its summer program back from six weeks to four weeks and drastically scale back its after-school program),
- the lice prevention program in the schools,
- home repairs funding,
- transportation assistance,
- school nurses,
- school social workers,
- programs to provide school clothes to area students,
- programs to pay school fees,
- job training programs,
- health and dental care programs,
- services for the elderly,
- early childhood education,
- funding for programs such as Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Careline and APAC.
- Ironically, these cuts were made at time when Ohio was sitting on an unspent TANF balance of more than \$300 million.

**In 2008**, ACJFS lost more than \$400,000 in state funding at the same time as costs were rising, and the agency had to cut \$850,000 from local programs. The cuts included:

- Kids on Campus, which once again had to reduce the number of children it could serve and the programs it could offer,
- Athens County Children Services,
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Athens County,
- Appalachian People's Action Coalition, which later closed,
- the HAPCAP Kids Back Pack program,
- My Sister's Place,
- United Seniors of Athens County,
- the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine's lice program.

**In 2009**, Athens County Job and Family Services lost \$1.3 million in state funding. The impact of this cut included:

- the agency eliminated 34 positions, 25 through layoffs and 9 through attrition,
- the teen pregnancy prevention program was eliminated,
- the dental program was eliminated,
- a program that provided emergency funding for car repairs, work uniforms and other expenses to help people keep their jobs was eliminated,
- a program that provided emergency funding program to help families stay in their homes had its eligibility rules tightened and the benefits reduced,
- a program that provided computers and training to low-income individuals was eliminated,

- the Fast and Free Tax Assistance Center, which provides free income tax preparation services to Athens County residents, had to be scaled back significantly,
- the time it takes for clients to have their applications for assistance or changes in their cases increased significantly.

**In 2010**, ACJFS lost more than \$1.25 million in state funding, in part because the federal stimulus money is no longer available. This forced several more cuts, including:

- the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) job training program lost the majority of the funding and had to significantly scale back the number of people it can assist,
- support for local food pantries had to be reduced,
- the budget cut also included losses of \$75,000 in Medicaid and food assistance program administration funds and \$55,000 for the child support enforcement unit.

**In 2011**, the state of Ohio will be considering additional budget cuts that could affect poor families once again. What if there are more funding cuts to programs that help poor people?

ACJFS Director Jack Frech said that the poor families in Ohio have already endured huge cuts in programs and services as a result of the Ohio Legislature's effort to balance the state budget.

"Any further cuts to these programs and services would be immoral at a time when we are granting tax cuts to the wealthy," Frech said.