



Senator Tim Schaffer
31st Ohio Senate District

GUEST COLUMN

December 7, 2011

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BRINGING RESPONSIBLE REFORM TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

BY STATE SENATOR TIM SCHAFFER

As we approach the final weeks of 2011, I cannot help but be reminded of the wave of change that came to Ohio this year. Since January, Senate Republicans have been hard at work crafting innovative, new plans to bring Ohio's economy back to a position of national prominence.

Every issue that we dealt with was done so with two major goals in mind: *reform and recovery*. From closing a multi-billion dollar budget shortfall and repealing the estate tax to enacting performance audits and creating job retention tax credits, we have done our best to better utilize your tax dollars and offer greater economic opportunity to Ohio's families.

I recently went before the Senate Health, Human Services, and Aging Committee to offer sponsor testimony on a bill that will further build on 2011's reform measures. If passed, Senate Bill 69 will establish a drug testing pilot program for Ohio Works First (OWF), the state's cash assistance program. The plan would require applicants for public aid to take a simple drug test. If an individual fails a test, he or she would then be referred to a certified alcohol and drug addiction program. The director of the Department of Job and Family Services would tap three Ohio counties to take part in the pilot program following a volunteer application process.

Legislation like this is intended to do two primary things. The first is to oversee the proper use of taxpayer dollars. In trying economic times like this, it is the duty of the legislature to eliminate any frivolous, inefficient and, especially, illegal uses of public funds.

The second goal of my bill is to ensure that help is afforded to the Ohioans that are most in need. It is a sad truth that there are some among us who continuously abuse a system that is intended to offer relief to families facing hard times. The reforms contained in Senate Bill 69 will limit the acts of fraud conducted by the few, while recommitting assistance to the many that remain in need.

We can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to this problem. Implementing this bill is the compassionate thing to do; it will fight to end the cycle of poverty by referring the drug users to treatment and protecting children. There is language in the bill to assure protection of children by providing a "protective payee" who would assure the children still receive their benefits despite their parent's denial.

Sound policy like this has been a topic of discussion throughout the United States for several years. As states continue to struggle with budget deficits and troubling unemployment figures, bold decisions must be made that help residents of all economic circumstances. Florida, Missouri, and Arizona have already enacted legislation similar to Senate Bill 69, and several other states are currently deliberating on related proposals.

Although the year is busy with holiday times upon us, a great deal of work lays ahead. I look forward to working with my colleagues and others to see this bill turned into law. As always, please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have questions or concerns about any of the matters we are considering at the Statehouse. I can be reached by phone at (614) 466-5838, by e-mail at SD31@senate.state.oh.us or by writing me at State Senator Tim Schaffer, Ohio Statehouse, 1 Capitol Square, Columbus, Ohio 43215. I look forward to hearing from you.

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State Senator Tim Schaffer was elected to the Ohio Senate in 2006 after serving in the Ohio House of Representatives for six years. His legislative accomplishments include enacting anti-corruption reforms, income tax indexing, and stronger penalties on sexual predators. He and his wife reside in Lancaster.