



*Verbal Testimony from Shiloh Kantz, Executive Director for the Oklahoma Policy Institute  
U.S. House Ways and Means Committee Field Hearing | Yukon, Oklahoma  
March 7, 2023*

- - -

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the topic “In What Ways Can the Federal Government Make the Economy Work For Oklahomans?” My name is Shiloh Kantz, and I am the Executive Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, or OK Policy. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy think tank.

While COVID-19 laid bare economic vulnerability in Oklahoma, these problems were not new. Oklahoma’s poverty rate is consistently among the nation’s highest. Even pre-pandemic, 1 in 7 Oklahomans, including 1 in 5 children, lived in poverty.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, 1 in 4 Oklahoma jobs were in an occupation with a median wage below the poverty line for a family of four. Our poverty rates have barely budged over the last decade.

Federal actions during the pandemic made a real difference. It’s a shame those interventions were not made permanent.

460,000 Oklahoma households — including 816,000 children — received the expanded Child Tax Credit in December 2022. The credit lifted an additional 59,000 Oklahoma children out of poverty.<sup>2</sup> That money was spent wisely on food, utilities, clothing, rent, and transportation, likely minimizing the trauma to our children. Now 276,000 Oklahoma children are losing out on that full credit.<sup>3</sup>

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit expansion helped working families secure child care to continue their employment. Qualifying Oklahoma families got back up to half of what they spent on child care that year.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, Josie, “Census data show Oklahoma still lags nation in poverty rate,” (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2020), accessed 27 February 2020 at

<https://okpolicy.org/census-data-shows-oklahoma-still-lags-nation-in-poverty-rate/>

<sup>2</sup> Jacobi, Gabrielle, “Oklahoma families need economic support following the ending of the expanded Child Tax Credit,” (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 28 February 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/oklahoma-families-need-economic-support-following-the-ending-of-the-expanded-child-tax-credit/>

<sup>3</sup> Marr, Chuck, et al., “Year-End Tax Policy Priority: Expand the Child Tax Credit for the 19 Million Children Who Receive Less Than the Full Credit,” (The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022), accessed 2 March 2023 at

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/year-end-tax-policy-priority-expand-the-child-tax-credit-for-the-19-million>

<sup>4</sup> “State-by-State Analysis on American Rescue Plan: Child Tax Credit goes to 866,000 Children in Oklahoma and EITC Expansion Benefits 236,000 More Workers,” (The White House, 2022) accessed 1 March 2023 at

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Oklahoma-Tax-Credit-1-pager-3.8.pdf>

Expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit meant there was a brief moment when Oklahoma's childless workers received targeted relief. The expansion tripled the EITC for childless adults and waived the usual age limits, and reached an estimated 229,000 childless workers in Oklahoma.<sup>5</sup> It, too, lapsed at year-end.

So where do low-income Oklahomans need support?

At work - Some Oklahoma workers are covered by federal FMLA protections, but they cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Only 1 in 20 of the bottom 10 percent of earners have paid leave.<sup>6</sup> Just 1 in 5 workers have access to paid leave, mostly higher income earners.<sup>7</sup> The impact these numbers have on Oklahoma's families is real.

More than half of Oklahomans, including 68 percent of rural Oklahomans, are in a child care desert: either no providers within their ZIP code or too few slots.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the number of child care facilities has fallen by two-thirds, from 6,000 to 2,300 this year.<sup>9</sup>

Housing was an issue before the pandemic: Oklahoma's two largest metros were in the nation's top 20 for eviction rates.<sup>10</sup> Emergency rent assistance helped, but it lapsed. Today, more than 2 in 5 Oklahomans working full-time can't afford a two-bedroom rental. An Oklahoma worker needs \$16.61 per hour to afford that two-bedroom, but 17 of the 30 most common professions in Oklahoma — teacher assistants, home health aides, and customer service representatives — pay less than that.<sup>11</sup>

What *has* worked?

Two major programs brought targeted relief including unemployment insurance and Medicaid expansion. When the pandemic hit, Oklahoma saw more unemployment claims in March 2020

---

<sup>5</sup> "Looking ahead: How the American Rescue Plan affects 2021 taxes, part 1," (Internal Revenue Service, 2021) accessed 1 March 2023 at

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/looking-ahead-how-the-american-rescue-plan-affects-2021-taxes-part-1>

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, Josie, "Paid Family and Medical Leave is a crucial step towards modernizing our economy," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2021), accessed 28 February 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/paid-family-and-medical-leave-is-a-crucial-step-towards-modernizing-our-economy/>

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, Josie, "Paid Family and Medical Leave is a crucial step towards modernizing our economy," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2021), accessed 28 February 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/paid-family-and-medical-leave-is-a-crucial-step-towards-modernizing-our-economy/>

<sup>8</sup> Jacobi, Gabrielle. "COVID-19 worsened an existing crisis for child care in Oklahoma," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 1 March 2023

<sup>9</sup> Hertneky, Dana. "DAYCARE DESERT: CHILDCARE CRISIS IN OKLAHOMA," (NewOn6, 2022), accessed 1 March 2023 at

<https://www.newson6.com/story/62451dacbdb8be071cc446e0/daycare-desert:-childcare-crisis-in-oklahoma>

<sup>10</sup> "Top Evicting Large Cities in the United States," (Eviction Lab), accessed 1 March 2023 at <https://evictionlab.org/rankings/#/evictions?r=United%20States&a=0&d=evictionRate&lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> "Out of Reach: Oklahoma," (National Low Income Housing Coalition), accessed 1 March 2023 at <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/ok>

than it did in 2009, at the Great Recession's peak.<sup>12</sup> While some fraudulent unemployment claims were made, including some involving OK Policy, those claims were investigated and determined ineligible for payment. The state's unemployment insurance system did what it was created to do in that unprecedented time - assist Oklahomans in their time of need.

And in the summer of 2020, Oklahomans passed Medicaid expansion through a ballot initiative. It's been an unequivocal success.<sup>13</sup> In January, 358,155 working-age adults were enrolled in expansion<sup>14</sup> Because of Medicaid expansion, Oklahomans exiting incarceration can enroll,<sup>15</sup> tribal health systems are more solvent,<sup>16</sup> and record levels of Oklahoma children are insured.<sup>17</sup>

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

---

<sup>12</sup> Cullison, Courtney, "Unemployment insurance keeps Oklahomans safe, supports the economy," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2020), accessed 1 March 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/unemployment-insurance-keeps-oklahomans-safe-supports-the-economy/>

<sup>13</sup> Morris, Emma, "Medicaid Expansion in Oklahoma: Year One," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 2 March 2023 at <https://okpolicy.org/medicaid-expansion-year-one/>

<sup>14</sup> "SoonerCare Fast Facts: January 2023," (Oklahoma Health Care Authority, 2023), accessed 2 March 2023 at

[https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/okhca/docs/research/data-and-reports/fast-facts/2023/february/Total%20Enrollment01\\_23.pdf](https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/okhca/docs/research/data-and-reports/fast-facts/2023/february/Total%20Enrollment01_23.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Gateley, David, "Medicaid expansion is a vital piece of reentry for Oklahomans leaving incarceration," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 2 March 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/medicaid-expansion-is-a-vital-piece-of-reentry-for-oklahomans-leaving-incarceration/>

<sup>16</sup> Morris, Vivian, "Medicaid expansion improved access to care for Indigenous Oklahomans," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 2 March 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/medicaid-expansion-improved-access-to-care-for-indigenous-oklahomans/>

<sup>17</sup> Morris, Emma, "New report shows Oklahoma led nation in improving health insurance coverage, but more than 75,000 Oklahoma children remain uninsured," (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2022), accessed 2 March 2023 at

<https://okpolicy.org/new-report-shows-oklahoma-led-nation-in-improving-health-insurance-coverage-but-more-than-75000-oklahoma-children-remain-uninsured/>