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**Labor Day: A Time to Celebrate Hard Work and How It Can Improve Families'
Circumstances**
By ODJFS Director Cynthia Dungey

COLUMBUS, OHIO – On this Labor Day weekend, as we celebrate the contributions of American workers, we must also remember those among us who have little or no work and don't earn enough to keep their families out of poverty. That's something I know about, at a very personal level, from my childhood in Columbus. And it's a statewide public-policy challenge I deal with today as director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

From time to time growing up, my family had to temporarily rely on government assistance when my parents were laid off from their jobs at Lazarus or the grocer. Those times were not easy, but we were not alone. Families in my neighborhood were just like us. We were the working poor. Like so many other Ohioans, then as now, we didn't choose to live in poverty, but those were our circumstances nonetheless. It takes personal and community engagement to battle poverty. Thankfully, we had both during our fight.

I spoke of this recently as part of a Columbus Metropolitan Club panel discussion on poverty and joblessness, sharing my own experiences to start the discussion. My fellow panelist, *Hillbilly Elegy* author J.D. Vance, also knows a thing or two about poverty. In fact, he wrote that "Poverty is the family tradition," in his insightful memoir. He and I agree that perhaps the biggest challenge facing those trapped in poverty is the culture in which they live.

I hope to change that culture as a member of Gov. John Kasich's cabinet tasked with addressing poverty in Ohio. I feel so strongly about our mission to not only provide immediate assistance for families in crisis, but also to provide long-term work support services that help adults move out of poverty. Experts tell us that four things can lead to poverty: having a baby before age 21, dropping out of high school, drug or alcohol addiction, and not having a job. While state and local resources are being applied to address each of these four root causes, at the Department of Job and Family Services we are particularly intent on attacking the job issue. We know this is the best and most direct way to help Ohioans break the cycle of poverty – because a job is the best anti-poverty program.

The good news is that Ohio has many resources available to help Ohioans find jobs. Ohio ranks third in the nation for the number of registered apprentices, who earn while they learn and can make as much as \$60,000 a year when they graduate, with no student loan debt. Our new Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program provides intensive career planning and support services to low-income 16- to 24-year-olds to help them build career paths, find employment and break the cycle of poverty. And Ohioans of every age and income level can take advantage of OhioMeansJobs.com, the state's online career and employment center, which lists more than 150,000 job openings at any given time, in addition to many other features. These include a resume builder and rater, a budget calculator, skill and interest assessments, online tutorials, free GED and college entrance practice tests, and special sections for veterans, students, unemployment claimants and workers with disabilities.



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For sure, Labor Day is a time to celebrate the value of hard work and how it can not only lift spirits, but improve families' circumstances, now and for generations to come. I salute Ohio's workers. But I also recognize those who seek a hand up to get out of poverty. Sometimes, a hand up is what you need most.

Dungey has served as ODJFS director since October 2013.

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The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services manages vital programs that strengthen Ohio families. These include job training and employment services, unemployment insurance, cash and food assistance, child care, child and adult protective services, adoption, and child support services.



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