

Ted Strickland  
Governor



Helen E. Jones-Kelley  
Director

30 East Broad Street Columbus, Ohio 43215-3414  
jfs.ohio.gov

**Senate Health, Human Services and Aging Committee  
Director, Helen Jones-Kelley – Confirmation Hearing  
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services  
April 18, 2007**

Chairman Coughlin, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am Helen Jones Kelley, Director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my goals and vision for ODJFS and answer any questions the Committee may have regarding my nomination to this position.

First, I offer my apologies for not being able to meet with all of you personally prior to today. I didn't want this to be the first time we put names and faces together but with our respective scheduling challenges, we simply weren't able to coordinate all the contacts. I expect that due to the budget process we will be meeting in the near future.

I take very seriously the privilege of serving as the Director of ODJFS. We have approximately 4,000 employees throughout the state and a budget over \$17 billion dollars. It is an awesome responsibility and not one to be taken lightly or for granted. I recognize that we are responsible for a lion's share of the state's budget and admittedly probably a lion's share of the communications you receive from constituents.

With that in mind, I need to have top talent to assist me in leading the organization. Governor Strickland encouraged me to build a strong team to assist me in managing the department. Indeed, I intend to do just, and have already begun this process. As you all know, quality staff is key to running a smooth, well functioning operation.

With respect to my nomination to the position of Director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, I can say that I am truly honored. ODJFS develops and monitors programs that provide health care, employment and economic assistance, child support and services to families and children.

The broad array of programs and services has one purpose: **To help Ohioans be healthy and safe while gaining and maintaining independence in their daily lives and careers.** A truly noble mission and one that I will make every effort to support and make a reality.

Indeed, too many people still view ODJFS as the "welfare department." They view us as the place for a "handout" instead of a "helping hand" and in the spirit of being totally candid, I

An Equal Opportunity Employer  
Printed in-house

know that we have lost some credibility with some members of the General Assembly. If I told you that the sun was shining outside, some of you have lost such faith in us that you would go to the window to check for yourself.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, members of the Committee, I now take full responsibility for any negative perceptions that any of you have of us and I commit to rebuilding your confidence in us. There are a lot of talented and dedicated employees at ODJFS. A lot of good is done there but it is rarely reported, so we are going to do a better job of telling our story.

We are also going to take the mystery out of ODJFS. Sometimes when asked a simple question, we respond that it's too complicated to explain, as if it would be too hard for the average citizen to understand. Well, it's the average citizen's tax dollars that we're asking you to entrust to us with so that we can operate our department. We have to be accountable to our average citizens, to all our taxpayers. As I stand here in front of you today, I fully understand that it was the taxpayers of this state who purchased the shoes on my feet; the clothes on my back. As I said earlier, I take my responsibility as a public servant and my nomination to this position very seriously.

ODJFS literally touches the lives of all 11 million Ohioans. Everyone has either been served by, or knows someone who has been served by Job and Family Services somewhere in the state.

Like me, they may have a mother who resides in a nursing home; they may have fostered or adopted a child; they may have two darling grandsons who benefit from quality early learning; they may have a brother who lost his corporate job after 24 years as the result of downsizing; they may have a short-term financial setback and need temporary assistance; they may be the primary caregiver for a relative; they may owe or be due child support from a previous relationship; they may be in contact with a young person who has been pushed out from his or her own home and is living from pillar to post; they may know someone who has served time in prison and is now struggling to re-enter and become positively engaged in the community.

ODJFS has an important role to play in affecting people's lives for the better, and I would like the opportunity to participate in this effort. As Governor Strickland has said, his philosophy for governing is to "live within our means and invest in what matters," and I truly believe ODJFS can be a critical tool in implementing this philosophy while we work together to turnaround Ohio.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.