

**Ohio House of Representatives**  
**House Finance, Health and Human Services Subcommittee**  
**Micah Haralson, The Alliance of Early Education**  
**March 22, 2017**

Good afternoon Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Ohio House Health & Human Services Finance Subcommittee:

My name is Micah Haralson. Owner and Operator of Connected Pathways Early Learning Centers. We currently operate 5 centers in northeast Columbus and Gahanna. We have been in this industry for over 8 years and have seen a tremendous amount of change in rules, regulations, and state expectations regarding the future of early learning in the state of Ohio. We currently serve 285 children receiving publicly funded child care.

Our purpose in serving our community is to offer a familiar face to issues our clients face on a daily basis. We are poster boards for hopeful change. Programs are designed for our demographic in efforts to inspire or offer a semblance of significance to the community we live and operate in; programs like Step Up to Quality (SUTQ).

On the surface it is a true blessing to organization such as ours. Current law and regulations were designed to support the development of Ohio communities that suffer from low or no quality early education. The standard for early learning has been established. This is a commitment, I believe, every person true to child-focused quality care can agree with.

The problem is this. The law requires all centers serving publicly funded children to reach quality by 2020 and become highly rated by 2025. However, as a provider we face enormous challenges becoming SUTQ rated, let alone highly rated. We know the requirements of SUTQ make a difference for children: quality curriculum, educated teachers, lower teacher/student ratios, just to name a few. But these also come with a cost.

We have an opportunity right now to set the stage for early development in Ohio to become one where children are not just safe but are educated, become ready to learn in kindergarten, and supported to become the productive citizens of the future.

**The cost of early learning is high: High in regulations, high in cost, but also high in need.** To reach the state goals of educating our youngest learners, we need your support to ensure these children have the resources necessary to get there. We respectfully request a portion of the current funds be directed to incentivize schools (childcare programs) to move into and move up in the quality system.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.