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**Ohio House of Representatives  
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
FY2020-2021 Operating Budget  
Groundwork Ohio  
Lynanne Gutierrez, Policy Director & Legal Counsel  
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Good Afternoon, Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West and members of the committee. I am Lynanne Gutierrez, Policy Director and Legal Counsel for Groundwork Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony concerning Substitute House Bill 166, Ohio's budget bill for state fiscal years 2020 and 2021. My testimony is limited to comment and concern on Ohio's quality child care system.

The evidence is overwhelming that brains are built by early experiences – in the first five years of life, 90% of a child's brain development happens with about 1 million neural connections made every second in the early years. We have a critical period of time to position all Ohio children for success.

Furthermore, young children in Ohio are experiencing high levels of toxic stress with the potential to cause long-last negative effects on cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. During the earliest and most critical years of development, children are highly vulnerable to adversity. As the frequency and length of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) increase, so do the impacts on physical and mental health, academic achievement, and self-sufficiency. Ohio ranks 46th in the nation for kids having three or more ACEs, putting them at higher risk for long-lasting negative effects.

We know that not all children have the same early experiences—children from low income families, children of color, and those living in Ohio's rural Appalachian region are at highest risk of starting kindergarten behind their peers. At-risk children's ability to develop on par with their peers is greatly compromised – for example, by age 3, low income learners have heard an average of 30 million fewer words than their higher income peers and their vocabulary is half as large. We also see huge gaps in kindergarten readiness between black and white children, regardless of family income level. Kids who start behind often stay behind. These indisputable facts explain why the investments made during the first five years of life are so significant. The earlier the investment, the greater the return. And the greatest return is when we invest in the kids most in need.

In this spirit, we want to celebrate a few critical investments that are included in Governor DeWine's Executive Budget. First and foremost, we want to praise the substantial increase in state funding for Help Me Grow evidence-based home visiting to the tune of \$50 million additional over the biennium. This includes an additional \$20.3 million in FY 20 and an additional \$29.3 million in FY 21 for a total state investment of \$90 million over the biennium, compared to \$40 million in the last biennium. This will support the governor's commitment to triple the number of families served through in evidence-based home visiting statewide.

Through the Help Me Grow program, the Ohio Department of Health provides critical support to new mothers and infants by implementing nationally recognized evidence-based models with the strongest evidence of effectiveness: improving birth outcomes, decreasing child abuse and neglect, increasing school readiness and achievement, bolstering family economic self-sufficiency, and reducing juvenile delinquency. Relying on evidence-based models ensures that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively and efficiently with some models reporting returns on public investment as high as \$5.70 per dollar invested.

I also want to recognize the Governor's continued commitment for kids through the proposed increase in state funding for Part C Early Intervention services in the amount of nearly \$27 million over the biennium which will be directed towards increasing children served by new automatic eligibility for children who test lead positive and babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome. In addition to the early intervention investment, Governor DeWine has also proposed \$22 million over the biennium as a first response to the issue of lead poisoning in children that will support advertising lead-free homes to families, abatement and remediation of lead contamination and demolishing blighted homes, an increase in the supply of lead hazard control workers and the creation of a lead abatement tax credit. Budget language also includes the creation of a primary prevention task force, which we hope will create a clear goal of eliminating childhood lead exposure, identify timelines for specific strategies and action steps, and identify future fiscal investments required to get there.

There is a significant increase in state funding for children's services to counties and language addressing the needs of multi-system youth—a critical support for those children who are impacted by increasing levels of trauma and toxic stress due to the opioid crisis.

Finally, I want to celebrate Governor DeWine's new investment of \$5 million over the biennium to create the Ohio Books from Birth Foundation to provide all Ohio children with a monthly book for the first five years of their life as well as the additional \$8.5 million going to local libraries over the biennium.

On behalf of Groundwork Ohio, I want to thank the Governor once again for recognizing the critical importance of investing in the early years of development for Ohio children in the proposed operating budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. As the budget continues to move through the legislature, our ask is that these critical investments be protected.