Testimony Regarding SB 216

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Good afternoon, Chair Lehner and members of the committee. I am Eric Karolak, CEO of Action for Children, and I’m here today to share concerns with components of this bill.

**About Action for Children**

Action for Children is a private, not-for-profit organization headquartered in Columbus and serving Franklin and six surrounding counties: Delaware, Fairfield, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union. We are the only non-profit organization exclusively focused on expanding access to quality early childhood experiences for all children in central Ohio. In the last fiscal year, we:

* helped more than 9,000 early childhood teachers improve their practice;
* prepared more than 100 practitioners to complete nationally-recognized para-professional certification;
* achieved a 98% success rate in helping child care programs achieve, maintain, or increase their rating in Ohio’s quality rating and improvement system, Step Up to Quality (SUTQ);
* helped hundreds of parents, including many restored citizen fathers, with individualized coaching and job placement; and
* provided 750,000 nutritious snacks and meals in child care settings.

This is important community-building work that lays the foundation for success in school and life. We support parents, family members, early childhood educators and child care programs all, with the strategies and tools they need to provide kids with quality early learning experiences. Ohio State estimates we reach 50,000 children in central Ohio annually.

**Concerns with SB 216**

With regard to SB 216, there are two areas of concern related to provisions that affect the statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and teacher licensure.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

The bill proposes to eliminate the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. The KRA, only a few years old and customized to meet our needs in Ohio, was developed and validated in a thoughtful and rigorous effort that included involvement of teachers and educators. The KRA is now available to teachers more quickly and gives them a formative look at their classroom. It also creates a statewide baseline, aligned to Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards, of the skills and abilities children bring when they enter school. This is how we *know* that 40% of children in Ohio enter Kindergarten ready to learn. SB 216 would eliminate the KRA leaving local education agencies to choose *whether* and which assessment they might use, effectively guaranteeing there won’t be one statewide. In losing a statewide assessment of school readiness, Ohio will lose the starting point for our accountability efforts. If the KRA needs fine-tuning, let’s have an expert review and identify improvements, rather than throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

Teacher licensure changes

SB 216 proposes consolidating teacher licensure bands from three (P-3, 4-6. 7-12) to two (K-8, 6-12), effectively eliminating preschool licensure. The current licensure bands recognize that preschool teachers are part of the education profession and appropriately reflect the different developmental needs of children. Fourth Graders aren’t the same as 4-year-olds, not developmentally at least, and what it takes to be effective in a 4th grade classroom is different than to achieve success with a Kindergartener. Again, it may be easy to wave a wand and eliminate preschool licensure allow superintendents to put 8th grade math teachers in charge of 22 preschoolers, but it’s not policymaking based on development research nor is it in the interest of what’s best for young children. It would be better to assure that each preschool and Kindergarten child have the most qualified teacher and that each teacher has the expertise to teach effectively at the level for which they are licensed.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns.