

**The Ohio Senate**  
**Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid**  
**FY2020-2021 Operating Budget**  
**Knox County Head Start**  
**Peg Tazewell, Executive Director**  
**May 16, 2019**

Good Afternoon, Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the committee. I am Peg Tazewell, Executive Director of Knox County Head Start. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony concerning 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 and funding.

I am a member of the Groundwork Steering Committee and past president of the Ohio Head Start Association, and I've worked in our Head Start program with full day child care services for over 20 years.

Knox County Head Start has been in operation since 1965, and was a typical Head Start provider until August of 1998 when the two local centers accepting child care vouchers closed, and local leaders requested we enter the child care arena.

Today, Knox County Head Start serves almost 500 children and their families annually, with federal funding for 257 Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start Child Care Partnership slots (for ease from this point I'll use the term Head Start). We serve 83 Head Start children plus 70 private pay/subsidized children in four full day, five star rated centers in Knox County. In our rural community, we have a crisis of available child care and currently have more than 80 children on waiting lists for care.

In recent years, in response to Ohio's drug crisis, more children are in kinship or foster care. We provide supports to families, especially grandparents, great-grandparents and other family members who are unexpectedly raising our youngest and most vulnerable children. Many of those families require child care services as well.

Head Start funds provide for the enhanced supports needed for children who were born drug addicted, or who have experienced unimaginable trauma in their young lives. From parenting support and education, to family advocacy to develop parental strengths and to achieve family goals - we support foster/kinship care parents, while also working with biological parents if family reunification is the goal. We are essentially focused in supporting parents and other caregivers in their role as the first and most important teachers of their children.

Our ability to provide the full range of comprehensive, high quality Head Start services, along with full day and full year child care, is dependent upon the leveraging of federal dollars and child care revenue in support of extended services.

In September 2017, ODJFS eliminated the ability of Head Start programs to layer Head Start and child care funds, requiring programs to back out Head Start hours from reimbursement. This resulted in a significant loss of revenue.

In December 2018 ODJFS implemented the 2016 Child Care Market Rate Survey, and Knox County moved from the lowest reimbursement tier to the highest -- this was a welcome change and offset some of the previous revenue losses.

The proposed budget seeks to *immediately* implement the 2018 market rate survey, which moves Knox County down one rate tier, with significant revenue losses.

This loss of revenue is unsustainable and could result in a reduction of child care slots in favor of six-hour, school year-based days.

We cannot maintain the level of quality required by Head Start and sustain further revenue losses when we are already struggling to provide a living wage to teachers, and benefits to maintain a strong workforce.

We cannot sustain federal funding with child care operations in the red.

We have insufficient child care slots available in our county for parents who are doing the RIGHT thing – by either completing their education or working full time to support their families. Funding reductions will make a bad situation -- in terms of limited slots available in rural communities – worse.

I respectfully request that the committee consider, at minimum, holding those counties who just four months ago were moved to a higher reimbursement tier – harmless -- in the current market rate changes. Please recognize that these continued funding changes undermine programs that are a crucial part of our community's infrastructure.

Further, I hope that the new administration will work with Head Start to return to a layered funding model in keeping with what most states allow and federal funders expect. Head Start's child care services and partnerships are a critical part of Ohio's mixed market system.

Finally, I plead with you to increase state funding to meet the unmet need for child care. We are desperate for the funding and resources necessary to serve all eligible children, and especially infants and toddlers. This will require additional state funding that maximizes our ability to leverage federal dollars.

Thank you for your time today, and I wish you well as you consider the difficult choices necessary to provide for our community's vulnerable children and families.