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**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
House Bill 110
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Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and members of the committee, my name is Lynanne Gutierrez and I am the Assistant Director at Groundwork Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 110, Ohio's FY 2022-2023 budget bill as it relates to invited testimony today from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

As you may know, Groundwork is a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization that champions high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families and communities. Our vision is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Groundwork is led by Executive Director, Shannon Jones, and governed by a robust steering committee of child-focused health and education experts from across the state.

Groundwork is testifying today as an interested party to House Bill 110 to express continued support for the maintenance of state funds in DODD's Part C Early Intervention program (Line Items GRF 322421 Part C Early Intervention, GRF 322420 Screening and Early Intervention Identification). Ohio Early Intervention (EI) is a collaborative home and community-based system administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities that provides coordinated, evidenced-based intervention services to parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays. EI serves infants and toddlers under age three who have a diagnosed physical or mental condition likely resulting in a delay in adaptive, cognitive, communication, physical, or social-emotional development. Early Intervention services are based on need and not income. As a result of Governor DeWine's leadership last budget, nearly \$25 million additional state funds over the FY20-21 biennium were invested in EI to support new automatic eligibility for children who elevated blood lead levels and babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome. All families served by EI are provided a local team consisting of a service coordinator and service providers that work with the family in order to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). The team works through the family's IFSP to utilize supports and enhance the child's learning and development.

This investment is important now more than ever in light of the toll the once-in-a-lifetime COVID-19 pandemic has taken on our most vulnerable children. Not only does the COVID-19 pandemic happen once in a lifetime, so does childhood. Our youngest children have a short, five-year period of critical brain development happening in the earliest years of their life to benefit from the love, care and learning they need to support their lifelong success. We often talk about the first 1,000 days setting the foundation for the rest of a child's life in recognition of over 80% of brain development happening in the first three years of life. Ohio's most vulnerable infants and toddlers have now spent a third of these precious 1000 days in this pandemic, enduring the stress, trauma and financial realities experienced by their families, caregivers and communities which deeply impacts their development.

Even prior to COVID-19, we know that low-income children are experiencing some developmental delays and needing early intervention services more frequently than their higher income peers. It is no surprise then that low-income children to be up to two years behind their higher income peers when they enter the kindergarten classroom and only 41% of all

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Ohio kids were coming to the classroom ready to learn. This number is far lower for low-income students and Black students. These children don't just start behind, they stay behind as national and state research have verified that kindergarten readiness is a predictor of third grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, high school graduation and postsecondary attainment. We have also investigated and affirmed how these gaps at kindergarten persist over a child's academic career in Ohio. Given this background, when reviewing the Ohio Department of Education's most recent report, *Data Insights: How the Pandemic is Affecting the 2020-2021 School Year* we are alarmed by the following urgent concerns for these children:

- Kindergarten Readiness Assessment:
 - Only 78% of enrolled kindergarten students completed the KRA (compared to 93% in 2019). The students who did not, were more likely to be students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged or non-white. There were 30% fewer Black students and 18% fewer low-income students who took the test.
 - Even among those who took the assessment, 47.6% of the students scored not on track (up from 2019 where 29.7% were not on track) for Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee.
 - A higher percentage of children taking the KRA scored in the lowest performance level, *Emerging Readiness*, than in any previous year (23.7% compared to 22.5% in 2019).
- Enrollment & Attendance:
 - Among all public districts, preschool and kindergarten enrollment is down in 2020-2021 with the decrease being greatest among districts that began the year fully remote.
 - Of those who are enrolled, students across the board are experiencing lower attendance and higher levels of chronic absenteeism, but particularly in urban elementary schools. Additionally, racial gaps are widening substantially in chronic absenteeism.

As you deliberate the budget with child-serving agencies, including DODD, who share the goal of meeting the needs of young children and families, we ask you to support and expand the incredible opportunity that our early childhood birth-to-five systems, especially Early Intervention, provide young children families in supporting this monumental task.

Accordingly, we reassert our support of existing appropriations in Early Intervention and believe the program needs to be expanded substantially to equitably meet the vast developmental needs of Ohio's infants and toddlers and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and please allow Groundwork Ohio and our partners across the state to support your work during the budget process.