



CUYAHOGA COUNTY
Office of Early Childhood/
Invest in Children



**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
House Bill 110**

**Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood – Invest in Children
March 4, 2021**

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and members of the Committee, my name is Dr. Rebekah Dorman and I am the Director of Cuyahoga County’s Office of Early Childhood, and Invest in Children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 110, as it relates to invited testimony today from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS).

Invest in Children is an interested party to HB-110, due to our work as Cuyahoga County’s public/private partnership that mobilizes resources and research to ensure the well-being of all young children in Cuyahoga County. As an early childhood system, we urge you to carefully consider the needs of families with young children in the important budget decisions now being made. Specifically, we encourage you to:

- Protect all important investments made thus far by maintaining current levels of state and federal investments in Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC)
- Keep Ohio working by helping parents afford childcare and ensuring more children in low-income families have access to high-quality care by expanding initial eligibility for publicly funded childcare from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 200% FPL
- Support enhanced investments to preserve and strengthen Ohio’s Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) system – an important objective standard of quality that families rely on when evaluating preschool and childcare options.
- Recognize and support the significant increase in operating costs the Covid-19 pandemic has caused Ohio’s early childhood providers and assist in the recovery of lost capacity by ensuring the sustainable funding throughout the FY22-23 budget.

For over 20 years, Cuyahoga County has made significant investments in our early childhood system. Our significant investment of local levy dollars builds upon the state investments to produce better outcomes for young children and families. Our most visible example of this is our Universal Pre-Kindergarten program (UPK) which only includes providers deemed high quality in the state’s Step Up To Quality rating system. The SUTQ system has been the crucial foundation upon which UPK was built, and now serves over 4000 children per year.

We are proud that, with local funding, UPK provides scholarships to low and middle income working families who don’t qualify for the child care subsidy due to its very low eligibility income threshold. In this way, we make high quality preschool more widely accessible to Ohio’s working families. Raising the income threshold as proposed to 138 percent of the federal poverty level is a positive step, but simply does not meet the needs of the many hard working Ohio families in our community seeking to give their children the best start in life.

There is no more urgent time than now to make child care in general, and preschool in particular, more affordable to working families, given the impact the pandemic has had on young children and the need for children to catch up in order to be kindergarten ready.

Implemented with a keen focus on achieving equity in kindergarten readiness among diverse and lower income families, the UPK program has achieved impressive results. A recent independent evaluation conducted by Case Western Reserve University found that children who attended a UPK preschool performed significantly better on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and the third-grade reading assessment than a matched sample of children from non-UPK preschools. Clearly our investments in quality and scholarships have made a difference for thousands of children. We have demonstrated that our multimillion dollar investment in UPK has produced a sizeable return on investment.

We value our partnership with the State that makes strong outcomes possible. HB-110 is an opportunity to strengthen this partnership through shared responsibilities in program direction and funding.