



Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children

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Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and members of the committee, my name is Kimberly Tice, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (Ohio AEYC). 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 Job & Family Services (ODJFS), and more specifically the publicly funded child care program administered by the Department.

Ohio AEYC is a statewide, professional association with a mission to empower all who care for educate and advocate on behalf of young children. We are the state affiliate for NAEYC, the largest and most respected professional association for early childhood educators in the country. We are committed to ensuring early childhood educators are educated, empowered, respected and well-compensated leading them to exemplify excellence in their work with young children during the most critical period of brain development. We explicitly represent over 2,000 members serving in all early childhood roles and settings while also supporting the entire early childhood profession across Ohio.

Ohio AEYC and its members believe every child deserves an equal opportunity to a high-quality educational foundation that prepares them to grow, learn and succeed in both school and life. Your investment in child care will support our efforts to deliver on the promise of early childhood education.

Funding child care is money well spent.

- Even prior to the pandemic, efforts to increase funding for child care was necessary to begin to reverse the effects of decades of underfunding by addressing child care deserts, serving more children and families, raising payment rates, and improving the quality of care and education.

- This positive return on investment is especially important now, as Ohio recovers from the Covid-19 crisis. These investments will help not only our working parents but will help our struggling businesses and ensure we have the resources to fully reopen our economy.
- Every additional dollar that goes to early childhood education is an investment in Ohio's recovery and its future. As the Chamber of Commerce recently stated, "*without this industry's survival and ability to safely care for the children of working parents, every other American industry will struggle to return to work.*"
- CARES funding made a difference in staving off the mass child care closures that would have happened in the absence of public investment. Yet even with CARES funding, for example, almost 40,000 early childhood educators in Ohio have lost or left their job during the pandemic, threatening child care supply, impacting healthy child development, and compromising the ability of this sector to support economic recovery.
- The crucial federal relief funding delivered by Congress in December was intended to supply much needed additional short-term assistance to providers for roughly three months, but we know the dire effects of the pandemic will be felt for months and possibly years to come.

Relief and recovery investments in child care are needed.

- By every measure, including the fact that the pandemic has left more families eligible for child care assistance than before, the child care sector requires significant additional investments.
- Ohio is still serving only a fraction of eligible children, and parents still struggle to pay for the cost of quality. We strongly agree with the testimony provided by Groundwork Ohio stating that "*The FY22-23 executive budget proposal includes a small increase in eligibility from 130% FPL to 138% FPL. While we are pleased to see this new commitment, it is not enough to meet the needs of working families today or in the future, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase is projected to serve 2,000 more in FY22 and 2,500 in FY23. Additionally, eligibility has been expanded to serve an additional 100 children in FY22 and 220-250 children in FY23 respectively who have special needs up to 150% FPL. In order to make meaningful progress on eligibility in the state of Ohio, initial eligibility must be increased to 200% FPL. We believe that a move in FY22 to 150% FPL provides meaningful relief to working families.*"
- Parents, especially women, are dropping out of the labor market and will struggle to return without child care.
- The impacts are even worse for families of color, who had trouble finding and affording care before the pandemic, and who have been especially harmed by the twin economic and health crises COVID has caused.

- The average wage for child care providers—skilled and valuable front-line professionals who have risked their health to provide education and care during a global pandemic—is only \$10.67 in Ohio with most not receiving health or retirement benefits.
- Child care providers have gone to enormous lengths to keep their doors open during the pandemic, with most staying open despite losing money and some taking on debt.

The pandemic created widespread financial disruption for the child care sector and the families who depend on it while increasing costs to providers to ensure that their programs are safe. Resources are needed over the long term to enact much-needed policies to address the totality of the child care crisis – and to address the significant gaps that existed prior to the crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we ask you to contact us if you have questions or concerns. We are happy to be utilized as a resource and to connect you directly to early childhood educators in your district who stand ready to share first-hand experiences with you related to this testimony.

NOTE: Testimony developed in partnership with our parent organization, the National Association for the Education of Young Children.