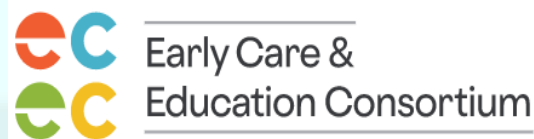


OHIO ALLIANCE FOR EARLY EDUCATION



**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Committee Health and Human Services Sub-Committee
Written Testimony on HB 110
Dave Smith
Ohio Alliance of Early Education, Proponent**

March 4, 2021

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Minority Member West, and members of the committee: On behalf of the Ohio Alliance for Early Education (Alliance), comprised of the Ohio Association of Child Care Providers (OACCP), the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA), and the Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC), we would like to convey our support for the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services child care, early development and learning provisions of HB 110.

The vast majority of Ohio kids who receive publicly funded early childhood experiences do so through child care programs. Ohio provides publicly funded child care to children of working parents living at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level and they may stay in the program until they are over 300%. The extent of child care services is determined by the parents' work schedule, ranging from hourly care to over 60 hours per week, and parents' financial contribution is determined by income level.

All children deserve the best possible start in life, regardless of their family income.

Child care for infants to 4-year-olds provides a critical opportunity to affect children during the most important period of development, in addition to being a necessary support for working families. Over the last several years, the child care program regulated by ODJFS has evolved from a traditional work support into quality early learning educational, curriculum-based programming that supports kindergarten readiness.

Our members also provide care and education before and after school hours to help support the extended learning and the care needs of working low-income families with children in elementary school.

It is important to note the majority of funds paying for this investment are an increased allocation of the Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds allocated in the 2018 & 2019 Federal Appropriations Acts. This increased allocation is for the purpose of helping states become compliant with the implementation of the CCDBG Act of 2014 that requires equal access to quality child care assistance.

Director Henderson spoke about the funding supporting child care. As you may know, all child care programs serving Ohio's publicly funded children are now quality rated in Ohio's Step Up to Quality Program and must be highly rated by July 1, 2025.

Cost of Quality

It is important to acknowledge the impact of the pandemic to the operational costs for programs. Programs have watched these costs increase an average 47%¹ since the start of the pandemic.

During Ohio's Stay at Home order last spring, child care centers stayed open under the ODJFS's Pandemic Child Care program. We served more than 24,000 children of essential workers. Child care programs were allowed to reopen on May 31, with reduced child-teacher ratios and increased sanitation requirements. Since August, providers have been able to return to their normal ratios, if they would like. Prior to the pandemic, more than 119,000 children were enrolled in our Publicly Funded Child Care Program. Right now, approximately 97,000 of our children from lower income families are back in quality child care settings.

As the child care industry continues to be "underfunded", there is an erupting crisis in hiring and retaining qualified staff. Pre-pandemic, many programs were running tight margins and faced staffing challenges; these thin margins impacted their ability to pay high quality teachers commensurate wages and provide benefits. During the pandemic and post pandemic, programs have struggled to entice staff back to centers not only due to health concerns, but also the enhanced federal unemployment benefits.

Therefore, continued investments are necessary to support the requirements to create and maintain quality early learning educational settings as well as to support the essential health and safety needs of the children, families and professionals working in the programs.

We ask for your continued support in investments in Ohio's early care, learning, and school-age system. The one-time investments to the system utilizing CARES funding have allowed the child care system to continue providing pandemic child care for families who have been identified as essential staff as well as for the families who have returned to work, but these funds are temporary and barely cover the increased operational cost in a program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about our programs, please contact Willa Ebersole, (614) 621-2000 or willa@tompappas.com.

¹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2020/09/03/489900/true-cost-providing-safe-child-care-coronavirus-pandemic/>