



Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Testimony

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Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Katie Kelly, and I am the Executive Director for PRE4CLE, Cleveland's Plan to expand access to high quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds in the city of Cleveland.

PRE4CLE is part of [Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools](#) (the Cleveland Plan), a plan that is reinventing public education in the City of Cleveland. High-quality preschool is the first step on the education continuum for transforming Cleveland's schools, providing a strong foundation for K-12 success, increased high school graduation, and increased higher education participation.

Through the three elements of our work — connecting families to high-quality public and private preschool programs, connecting preschool providers to tools and resources to increase their quality and serve more children, and providing strategic leadership to accelerate the availability of high-quality preschool in Cleveland — PRE4CLE provides a gateway for Cleveland's children to start strong and Cleveland communities to prosper.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare many of the weaknesses in our early education system, and we will highlight some of those for you here today. However, we also think that this is an opportunity to build a newly-resilient system that offers greater access to high-quality care and education to children, reliable and affordable care to



families as they head back to work, and fair compensation for child care and early education professionals.

Through the lens of our previous work, our learnings, and our continued objectives, I would like to share our thoughts on HB 110, the main operating budget. In particular I will focus on what we believe it will take to best support our youngest learners as they grow and develop and support their families as everyone works to recover any time lost, or mitigate the effect of, the last year. I will also share ideas on how to support our workforce in the early childhood space specifically.

Strong Investments in Ohio's Young Children in the Budget

While the majority of our testimony today will be focused on Ohio's child care system, we did want to praise the very strong investments that Governor DeWine has made in several areas impacting young children over the last few years including home visiting, early intervention for special needs infants and toddler, lead abatement, children's services, and early literacy. Together these thoughtful investments represent a huge step forward in ensuring Ohio's children ages birth-to-five have the comprehensive services they need to grow and thrive, and we strongly support maintaining these investments in this budget.

Connecting Families with High-Quality, Affordable Preschool Education

Opportunities

We are encouraged by Governor DeWine's and Director Halls' budgeted commitment to increasing the child care eligibility criteria for subsidized publicly funded child care from 130% to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in HB 110. This is an important first step in fulfilling the stated commitment to raise eligibility to 150% FPL. ***Right now, Ohio sits in 49th place when it comes to our eligibility for publicly funded***



child care. At this critical moment in time, our youngest learners need more access to quality care, not less.

We continue to urge the General Assembly to work towards aligning the eligibility levels of all early learning programs in Ohio at 200% of the federal poverty level to support Ohio's current working families and increase kindergarten readiness for our youngest children, and request the House raise the eligibility to 150% FPL in this budget as our first step towards that goal.

High-quality child care is a critical component of Ohio's early learning system, but for many parents, the price puts child care out of reach. National studies show that the lack of affordable child care can greatly decrease parent's productivity, including forcing some parents to quit or decrease work hours, pass up promotions, and miss work. In 2016, 75,669 Ohio parents quit a job, did not take a job, or greatly changed their job because of child care problems. Imagine what those number might look like at this time-a time when we know parents are struggling because of a loss of a job due to the pandemic, or reduced hours. At a time when Ohio needs all those in the workforce to engage, a lack of high-quality child care should not be what holds a parent down from moving up the career ladder.

Again, while we applaud the use of our federal COVID relief dollars to increase the market rates for providers, we believe an infusion of state dollars to raise eligibility would also increase access for many of our families to high-quality, putting our children on a path to success.

Additionally, we support Governor DeWine's proposed adjustment of the child care market rate to ensure that all publicly-funded providers maintain a floor of the 25th percentile.



Kindergarten Readiness Results in Cleveland

I would like to close with a brief discussion on the results we are seeing in Cleveland as we expand access to high-quality preschool. This information is Cleveland specific, but Cleveland's story is not unique-the same effects are being felt all across the state and the country.

Cleveland's children face some of the most difficult challenges that children can face. Starting before birth and continuing through all their critical early years, many Cleveland children face inequities that research tells us can deeply interrupt their brain development, social-emotional well-being, and academic success, leaving negative impacts well into adulthood. These include high rates of early births, extreme poverty, interaction with the child protective system, lead poisoning, and more. All of this-all of it-has been exacerbating by the pandemic over the last year. Children feel our stress, and the need to understand and mitigate how the pandemic overlays everything mentioned above is necessary for us to give these children their best chance at success.

Preschool is certainly not the only the only support needed to address these concerns, but what it can do to break the cycle of poverty and inequity is incredibly powerful. Looking at our own results since PRE4CLE began in 2014, on average each year 17.0% more children who receive a 'high dose' of PRE4CLE preschool (attending 8 or more months in the year before kindergarten) enter kindergarten scoring in the top two bands of the KRA compared to their peers in unrated settings.

Clearly, there is more work to be done to ensure that children have the right supports from birth to kindergarten to increase readiness, but high-quality early learning is



making a significant difference in the lives of our children, and ultimately for the well-being of our entire community.

In order to maintain the gains that we have made in kindergarten readiness, both in Cleveland and across the state, we urge you to continue to support the Step Up To Quality system and the goals supporting all publicly-funded child care providers to reach a high-quality rating by 2025.

You have many important issues you are weighing in this budget, and we all appreciate the gravity of your task. What we would urge you to consider is the cost of waiting two more years to make these important state investments in our young children. Every biennium that we push the pause button on providing these opportunities for our children is allowing tens of thousands of Ohio children to miss an opportunity that is proven to give them a fair chance to succeed.

Thank you for your attention and I am always available to answer any questions.