



**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
House Bill 110
Elizabeth Hibbs, M. Ed.
Early Childhood Education Alliance
May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, my name is Elizabeth Hibbs and I am the Director of the Early Childhood Education Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony expressing my support for amendment SC2363, which would expand initial child care eligibility from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 150% of the FPL in House Bill 110.

As a community leader and SPARK home visiting educational provider, I firmly believe that quality early child care and education is a critical part of our nation's infrastructure. It must be prioritized as such, and I believe that this amendment is a good start. Early childhood education and care is the cornerstone of our society and all of its functions. Businesses depend on employees, and employees need to know that their children are in a safe, nurturing environment. Unfortunately, many Ohio families cannot afford quality child care or it isn't available to them.

Prior to the pandemic, I witnessed this in the community that I serve—Alliance, Ohio. Through meetings with local business owners, it was determined that access to quality early childhood care and education was a priority and need for both the businesses and their employees. These meetings stemmed from a letter that was written by an employee who was unable to be at work due to issues with child care. The business owners agreed to prioritize access to early childhood care and education for their employees, and then COVID arrived.

COVID compounded the issue by causing businesses to close—including early childhood centers. A lack of access to affordable child care was already an issue, and now it had become an anchor pulling down the entire ship. This wasn't and isn't just an Alliance problem. This is a state and national problem.

Since the pandemic began, more than 12.2 million women nationwide have lost their jobs and more than 4.6 million of them have not returned to work. In addition, access to affordable early childhood care and education has diminished. Single parents have been forced to decide between keeping a roof over their family's heads or ensuring that their children are properly cared for during one of the worst times in our nation's history since the Great Depression. Access to affordable and quality child care is necessary for both our short term and long term recovery.

As a parent, I can speak to the lack of affordable child care in Ohio. My two daughters are now 12 and 14. When they were young, I had to use my entire retirement savings to pay for their child care and early childhood education. I am now working to rebuild my retirement savings, and don't know if I will have enough money to ever retire. If I had to do it again, I would—but shouldn't have to do so while living in one of the richest nations in the world.

My children's care, well being, health, and education come first—as it should. Investing in quality early childhood education and care is a shrewd business decision and economic investment. Research shows that investments in quality early childhood care and education yield a 13% return on investment. Children who have received a quality early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school, avoid teen pregnancy, and go on to acquire a college education or become skilled in a trade. This boosts the economy and creates better citizens. If Ohio invests in its people, the people of Ohio will in turn invest in Ohio.

This amendment isn't a partisan issue. Investment in quality early childhood care and education impacts everyone, as it directly impacts the economy for years to come. Currently, only 41% of Ohio children come to kindergarten ready to learn. Through my work via the SPARK program, I've witnessed firsthand the positive impact that quality early childhood education and experiences have on children and their families. Children in the Alliance SPARK program consistently score higher on their Kindergarten Readiness Assessment than their non-SPARK peers and meet the Language and Literacy cutoff score at a higher rate.

Prior to the pandemic, 94.1% of children in the SPARK Alliance program met the Language and Literacy cutoff score on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, as compared to only 70% of their non-SPARK peers. Throughout the pandemic, the Alliance SPARK program continued to serve families virtually and via socially distanced lessons as permitted. Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results now show that children in the 2020 Alliance SPARK cohort were 16.5% more likely to meet the Language and Literacy cutoff score on the KRA than their non-SPARK peers. Quality early childhood education makes an impact, and that impact lasts a lifetime.

As it stands now, a working single parent with two young children can only qualify for publicly funded child care if the parent is making less than \$28,236 (\$13.57 per hour) annually. Expanding to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) would allow a single parent making less than \$32,580 (\$15.66/hour) annually to have access to affordable, quality child care without spending approximately half of his or her income on child care. Currently, the estimated cost for two young children who do not qualify for publicly funded child care is over \$16,000 per year. Passing amendment SC2363 would put Ohio on the map, as the majority of states currently have an eligibility rate higher than 150% of the FPL.



For all the reasons stated above, I am respectfully urging you to consider expanding initial eligibility for the publicly funded child care subsidy from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 150% of the FPL as provided in amendment SC2363 and House Bill 110. The pandemic has made clear now more than ever that if we want to have a thriving economy, we need increased access to quality child care so that parents and caregivers can return to work and stay on the job. Now is the time for us to double down on our commitment to Ohio's youngest and most vulnerable children, as well as the families who support them. The Ohio General Assembly has the opportunity to keep Ohioans working and businesses operating, help families break out of poverty, and ensure more Ohio children have access to high-quality early learning by expanding access to quality and affordable child care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today and please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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