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House Bill 110  
Dawn Blalock  
Little Miracles Early Development Center

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, my name is Dawn Blalock and I am the Program Manager at Little Miracles Early Development Center. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state biannual budget for FY22-23 as it relates to Ohio's publicly funded child care program and it's quality rating improvement system, Step Up to Quality.

*In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson wrote, "Poverty perpetuates itself. ... children are inheritors of poverty's curse and not its creators. Unless we act, these children will pass it on to the next generation, like a family birthmark."*

**Little Miracles EDC** is an Ohio licensed 4 star Step Up to Quality child care program that prepares future generations for life long success through quality early learning experiences and family partnerships. We are open non-traditional hours from 5am-12am midnight. Our program have put a lot time and money into supporting the Step Up to Quality rating system and we have seen beneficial education outcome for our students since we have participated. Since receiving our first star in 2016, our teachers were excited about where the program was headed and was thirsty for more quality. In 2017 we obtained 2 stars and by the end of the next year we were successfully rewarded 4 stars. Now with our recertification coming up within the matter of days; we are working overtime to achieve 5 stars.

When we think about all that has been going on with the social unrest in our society, early childhood development is another area that needs attention. Programs like Step Up to Quality benefit communities of lower income and that have been left behind from generations of systematic neglect. The Senate's decision to eliminate Step Up to Quality will create a two-tiered child care system of haves and have-nots, where low-income children are denied a fair shot at a better early education. It is imperative that you do not contribute to the perpetuation of the education gap cycle by taking away these types of programs. Blacks, Latinos, Appalachians and others in the lower income to below the poverty line should be given an opportunity to better themselves and it starts with education. Do not devalue those lives and the contributions that have been and will be made if provided the means and resources to advance.

These types of barriers have been in place for years and make it hard for minorities and those living in poverty to successfully climb the social-class ladder. Studies have shown that children that attend a high quality preschool program were more likely to graduate high school and attend college. Fewer smoke, drink, use drugs, receive welfare or have gone to prison. There is a negative correlation which simultaneously place individuals at higher risk of crime due to low educational outcomes. We need to use education as a way for crime prevention by closing the achievement gap and equipping Ohio's underprivileged children thus allowing them to break generational barriers and become financially secure and able to continue to stimulate Ohio's economy.

Step Up To Quality is crucial to Ohio's providers, workforce, and children for many reasons. First, it provides children with quality learning environments that are safe and nurturing while parents are away at work providing for their families. These standards require assessments for early intervention and are performed periodically throughout each stage of a child's early years to determine and identify developmental delays or disabilities. It promotes family engagement and allows for providers to share each child's personal progress throughout each developmental stage. Step Up to Quality standards ensure that programs are using a curriculum that is aligned with the Ohio Department of Education standards to ensure that children are meeting each developmental domain such as social emotional, gross and fine motor, cognitive, language and literacy. The program standards are based on national research identifying standards which lead to improved outcomes for children.

The curriculum set up by Step Up to Quality introduces new experiences to the children which helps with their social and emotional development. These milestones include the social aspects of smiling, playing, and interacting with others as well as emotional necessities of expressing oneself and developing strong self-esteem. We are currently seeing more and more children in our care that are having trouble communicating about their needs and with their friends. Children are having tantrums more frequently and some last for over 30 minutes because they do not have the necessary self-regulation skills to calm their bodies down when they are frustrated or upset. Children with these delays benefit from intentional classroom activities and interacting with their peers in a safe setting while building confidence and self-esteem. Imagine having a classroom with 14 toddlers and 5 of your students have behavioral and emotional challenges. Teachers must be qualified with an educational background and professional development that trains them in being able to provide tools for these students to self regulate and allow them the opportunity to develop the skills to calm themselves down on their own. A less qualified teacher without the basic understanding of why children have tantrum will most often become frustrated and overwhelmed which can cause an environment that is not safe or nurturing and could possibly to lead to harmful incidents.

Step Up to Quality also requires for programs to periodically perform developmental screening for each student. These screenings expose physical delays in gross and fine motor skills that can be signs of a serious health condition. Currently we are seeing numerous children that do not have the ability to do activities like rolling over, sitting

without support, or walking that other children their age are doing. Teachers must be qualified to be able to identify and choose intentional activities to help support these types of developments. A less qualified teacher without the basic understanding of how to recognize these delays and plan intentional activities that will provide the child more opportunities to meet these milestones can cause more of Ohio's children to be further behind more than ever. We must have classrooms with teachers that are educated and trained with the necessary skills to determine what specific activities that are needed for each child in their care to grow.

Childcare is the backbone of our society and we are considered the workforce behind the workforce. The sustainability of a quality child care system is critical to benefit Ohio's working families. In its current state, child care desperately needs highly rated programs to provide quality care and early education to Ohio's youngest children. The decision to eliminate Step Up to Quality is taking the child out of child care because its focus is more on numbers than quality of care for the child.