



HEALTH
COMMITTEE

Witness Form

Today's Date May 4, 2021

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Organization Representing: Montgomery County, Ohio

Testifying on Bill Number: 134-HB110

Testimony: Verbal Written Both

Testifying As: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist? Yes No

Special Requests: _____

Montgomery County, Ohio
Testimony before the Senate Health Committee
In support of 134-HB110

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of Montgomery County, Ohio, in support of 134-HB110, to provide additional eligibility for publicly funded child care. It is a particular privilege to testify before this Committee, whose Chair and Vice Chair represent Montgomery County.

In mid-April, the *Dayton Daily News* printed an “Other Voices” op-ed from me regarding the important lessons we learned during the current COVID crisis regarding the essential nature of child care to the State’s economy. The entire op-ed is provided below; the essential point is that while child care allows Ohio’s workers to work and provide for their families and grow the State’s economy, many working families need assistance in order to afford the high cost of child care. Increasing public support of child care will allow parents to continue to work, rebuild, and grow Ohio’s economy.

Currently, families earning 130% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible for assistance. The House-approved 134-HB110 raises this to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level. At this 138% standard, a family of four may earn no more than \$36,570 annually to be eligible for assistance. Ohio has one of the strictest standards for child care support in the country. This strict standard is holding back the State’s workforce, businesses that rely on employees, and our entire economy. I believe it needs to be raised to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level. This 150% standard would extend assistance to families of four earning no more than \$39,750.

The closing line of the op-ed I wrote really sums it all up, “Children only have one chance at early childhood. We need to seize that opportunity and ensure that all children have access to quality early learning experiences.” It is my pleasure to provide this material to the Committee and to encourage the Committee to provide additional eligibility for publicly funded child care.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Early childhood must be a priority in the state budget

By Carolyn Rice

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our world so much. We learned about the virus sweeping through the world and making its way to our country, and we closed our businesses, schools, and government buildings so we could brace for the effects of the virus.

We, as a nation, learned so many lessons, many the hard way, on how to quickly respond to an enemy we couldn't see. We learned over the months how best to keep our precious communities safe. We also learned through this experience that there are gaps to vital services that must be bridged to effectively care for the people who care for us.

One of those gaps that must be addressed is how we provide child care in our state and around our nation. Access to affordable, quality child care is essential to working families and employers.

At the height of the pandemic when much of our economy was at a standstill, thousands of Ohio child care professionals kept working so first-responders, health care professionals, grocery employees and other essential workers could be on the job. What would we have done if these dedicated early educators had not been available for those families and children? If child care providers had not continued to work during the pandemic, what could the disruption of a small child's schedule have had on their cognitive and emotional development?

Among the families served are those who are employed but cannot possibly pay market-rate for child care, which can cost hundreds of dollars per week for a baby or toddler.

Ohio's assistance program, Publicly Funded Child Care, helps some of these working families afford child care allowing them to stay in the workforce. But the initiative is embarrassingly underfunded and available only to those in the most dire of financial straits.

For example, a mother of two children must earn less than \$14 per hour, or under \$28,236 yearly, to be eligible. Those who make above that wage, must spend up to one third of their gross income to pay for the care of just one child.

Other states are doing a little better at encouraging work and supporting families who are eager to take jobs, work overtime, earn promotions, and accept raises, so they can become financially independent. Only two states in the country, Alabama and Indiana, have even more restrictive eligibility rules than Ohio.

Ohio lawmakers will soon write the state's upcoming two-year budget. Gov. Mike DeWine is proposing raising the subsidized child care eligibility standard from 130% to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). While that is a start, it is not nearly enough.

If we moved to 150% of the FPL, an estimated 1,100 more Montgomery County children and some 900 workers would benefit. Think about what that could mean to citizens struggling to feed and care for their families.

I'm so proud that Montgomery County is investing in children's early learning through the Preschool Promise program that makes quality preschool more affordable to families with 4-year-

olds. We also have the Imagination Library initiative which provides books to children younger than five, free of charge. Additionally, the County supports the Birth to 3 Collaborative, which brings together agencies that are promoting the health and development of babies and toddlers when their brains are growing the fastest.

While agency collaboration is vital, we also need the state and federal government to invest more in our children because we can't do this hard work alone.

Gov. DeWine and state lawmakers are under tremendous pressure and the pandemic has unquestionably created new needs for families. However, we must shift the focus back on our children, because they are Ohio's future and deserve all the investments we make in them.

Children only have one chance at early childhood. We need to seize that opportunity and ensure that all children have access to quality early learning experiences.

Carolyn Rice is a Montgomery County Commissioner.

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TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

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