



## **HB 676 – Regards Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care Centers**

### **Sponsor Testimony**

#### **Representative Rachel Baker and Representative Cindy Abrams**

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the Families and Aging Committee, thank you for allowing us to come and testify on House Bill 676, legislation that would establish Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care (PPEC) centers in Ohio.

PPEC programs are non-residential community-based early childhood education programs for children with complex medical needs. These centers offer a daycare and early childhood education experience for children, who because of severe medical needs, are currently often at home with 1:1 nursing care. As we all know, Ohio is facing a shortage of home health aides and nurses and many families of children with complex medical needs find themselves without home health care services as needed. In learning about this need, we've also heard of children essentially living in a children's hospital inpatient room because their family was unable to secure nursing care to support them living safely at home. Even in the rare case when these families are able to find adequate home nursing, these children receive minimal socialization and inclusion in early childhood experiences spending the majority of their day at home with a home nurse or their family. In March 2023, a southwest Ohio taskforce surveyed Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, representing all 88 counties regarding child care access for children with complex medical conditions, and 89% reported "poor access" to child care for children who require nursing staff services.

PPEC programs are a way to address the scarcity of home health nurses, while providing children with complex medical needs a safe early childhood education and socialization experience in a classroom environment. Centers are staffed with a medical director, nurses providing routine and emergency care, and classroom teachers who build lesson plans and activities to meet each child's needs. Many of these centers in other states partner with local healthcare providers so that children can receive occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical therapy while at the center, freeing families up from running to health appointments after work.

Many states currently license and fund PPEC centers, including Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, California, Colorado, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and South Carolina. Ohio is home to the number 1 children's hospital in the country. I worked for Cincinnati Children's Hospital for years and met families of children with complex medical needs who moved to Ohio for our pediatric health care. However, once here many families discover that while they are getting the top level of medical care, the community does not have the resources in place for these children to have a typical early

childhood education experience. In Cincinnati, many of these families choose to live across the river in Kentucky to receive PPEC experience.

In talking with families who have children attending these centers in Kentucky, I learned another perspective. Many of these centers are designed to be inclusive environments with a portion of the children having complex medical needs and the other portion being typically developing children. This allows families to send all of their children to the same early childhood center and allows typically developing children to have an experience in an inclusive learning environment where empathy and learning about children with different abilities can occur. While these centers can be life-changing to children with complex medical needs, it has been moving to learn about how impactful attending a PPEC center has been for typically developing children.

This legislation would make PPEC centers a possibility in Ohio - it sets up a licensure process through the Department of Health through which centers would apply to become PPEC centers. Centers would achieve this licensure in addition to the current child care center licensures. Additionally, the legislation sets up a Medicaid waiver program that would pay a daily rate for a child who qualifies based on medical need.

Thank you so much for hearing our testimony today and now my joint sponsor, Representative Abrams will offer her testimony.

Finding the right childcare, especially for a child with complex medical conditions, can be an obstacle for parents. Having reliable and consistent early childhood education allows parents to remain in the workforce and reduces workplace absenteeism. PPEC centers, under this legislation, would be available to Ohio children following a referral to the program by a licensed physician, the child must be either medically or technologically dependent, and the child must be medically stable prior to beginning PPEC services.

As Representative Baker mentioned earlier, we have both had the honor of visiting a PPEC center in Northern Kentucky - Easterseals Redwood. Easterseals Redwood is a licensed five-star child care center that currently provides child care to more than 140 children, 63 of whom have medical complexities. We would like to thank Pam Green, President and CEO of Easter Seals Redwood for working with us.

It is obvious that no parent, let alone any child, wants to be in a hospital if they do not need to be, and the families who are able to utilize Easterseals Redwood will tell you the same thing; no matter how proud we are in Cincinnati of the top of the line care our children can receive at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. PPEC centers help to provide a sense of comfort for these families to know that their children are receiving the medical treatment they need without needing to go to the hospital.

In closing, House Bill 676 is a win-win for children with complex medical needs, their families, and our communities to ensure proper and accessible early childhood education for children with complex medical conditions. Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the Families and Aging Committee, thank you for allowing us to come and testify on this very important bill and we welcome any questions at this time.