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**Ohio House
Finance Subcommittee on Primary & Secondary Education
House Bill 33
Lynanne Gutierrez, Chief Operating & Policy Officer
Groundwork Ohio
March 21, 2023**

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacson, and distinguished members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary & Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 33. My name is Lynanne Gutierrez, and I serve as the Chief Operating & Policy Officer at Groundwork Ohio.

Groundwork Ohio is a nonpartisan public-policy research and advocacy organization. Our organization focuses on the time when children's experiences and environments most influence their health, development, and life trajectory: from birth to age 5. We work to ensure that every baby, toddler, and young child in Ohio has the resources and opportunities for a strong start. It is never too early to invest in a child, but it can be too late.

The vision of Groundwork Ohio is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child so that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We believe providing preschool to three- and four-year-olds is critically important to achieve this vision. Currently, the Early Childhood Education Grant provides for 12.5 hours of preschool each week to less than 15% of income eligible three- and four-year-olds. House Bill 33 proposes expanding preschool access through the Early Childhood Education Grant to an additional 11,525 children from low-income households, growing the program to over 29,000 children each year and reducing the number of unserved children from low-income households by 25%.

We ask the Subcommittee to support the Governor's proposed expansion of preschool, as well as support an additional \$46 million over the biennium. These additional funds would allow local communities to open more preschool classrooms, pilot full day programming and implement other locally identified innovations.

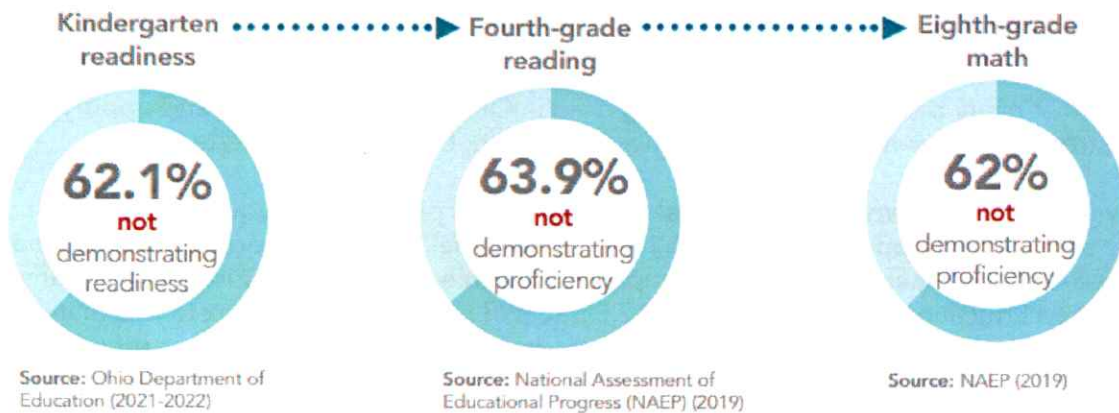
Students in Ohio are starting behind and staying behind.

As you deliberate on this bill, it is crucial you understand the importance of early childhood education for our future workforce and the future of this state. After two years of extensive research, fact-gathering, and input from children and family experts throughout the state, including families themselves, we proudly released the 2023 [Early Childhood Data Dashboard](#) earlier this year. This first-of-its-kind tool incorporates more than 60 metrics across six domains, including early learning access, kindergarten readiness, poverty, prenatal

care, well-child visits, and more, spotlighting the immense challenges and broad inequities faced by the families in our state.

One key takeaway from our research reveals that Ohio kids are starting behind in kindergarten and staying behind. Research shows a strong connection between a child’s readiness to enter kindergarten and their math and reading skills throughout their academic career. Currently, 62.1% of Ohio kindergartners are not demonstrating readiness for kindergarten and children who are economically disadvantaged are more than two times less likely to demonstrate kindergarten readiness than their more affluent peers (76.9% of economically disadvantaged kindergartners are not demonstrating readiness). This gap in kindergarten readiness exists in suburban, Appalachian, rural and urban counties (see Appendix A). Even counties that perform relatively well overall see a gap in readiness for children from economic disadvantage. Even more alarming is that this readiness gap doesn’t close—nearly the same percentage of children who do not demonstrate readiness for kindergarten also do not demonstrate proficiency in fourth grade reading or eighth grade math. It’s no surprise that most children aren’t ready to learn and continue to struggle throughout K-12 given that only about half of children ages 0-5 under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are able to access any state funded child care, preschool or Head Start.ⁱ

Figure 1: Kindergarten Readiness



According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, Ohio ranks 37th in the nation for access to preschool for four-year-olds and 33rd in state spending.ⁱⁱ When children are prepared for kindergarten, they are prepared for future academic success. This is why early investment reaps such substantial rewards. Not only does it improve school readiness but builds a strong foundation for a lifetime of success for Ohio kids.

Approximately a third to a half of low-income 3-and 4-year-olds are not being served by any publicly supported preschool programming. In school year 2022-2023, Ohio is serving approximately 88,000 low-income 3-and 4-year-olds across varying programs, including the state’s Early Childhood Education program, preschool special education, publicly funded child care, and the Head Start program.ⁱⁱⁱ Children in some of Ohio’s most vulnerable counties are not being served by the current state investment in preschool (see Appendix B).^{iv} Without further investment in the Early Childhood Education Grant, they never will.

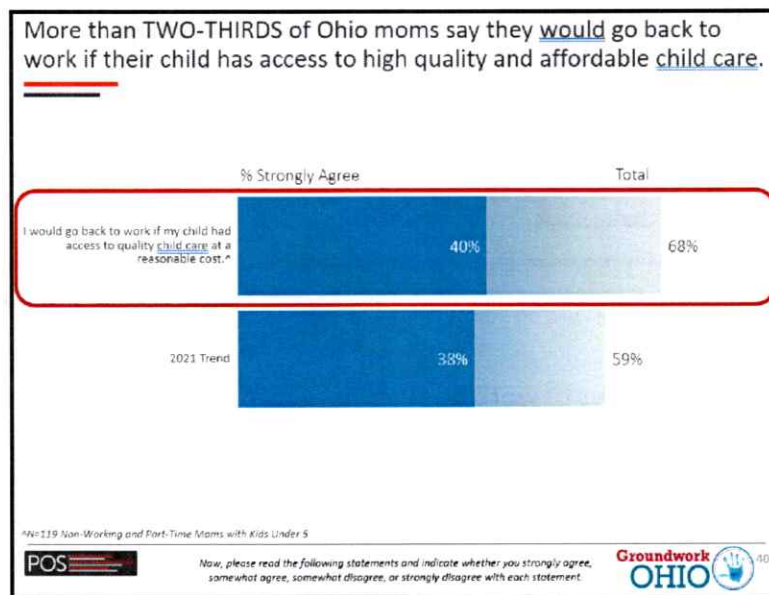
Investing in young children today and tomorrow strengthens Ohio.

Early learning experiences set the foundation for school readiness and positive outcomes in school and life. Ninety percent (90%) of a child's brain is developed by age five and research shows that children who participate in preschool have more developed language and social skills when entering kindergarten, are more likely to graduate from high school and have good careers as adults.

Preschool and child care are inextricably linked and the children attending a preschool program using the Early Childhood Education grant require additional child care beyond the 12.5 hours a week covered by the grant. Many working families cannot utilize the Grants unless they have child care for the remainder of their work week. Because of this, it's imperative that the Early Childhood Education grant be viewed within the full scope of early care and education opportunities for children birth to age five. There are currently 348 Early Childhood Education grantees. Over a third of these grantees are private child care and Head Start programs, while the remaining grantees are local education agencies, including school districts, community schools and educational service centers. Preschool experiences in a child care setting often closes the care gap that working parents need.

A recent poll by Public Opinion Strategies highlighted the difficulty parents have in accessing and affording child care which plays a foundational role in stabilizing families, businesses and rebuilding our economy. Nearly 70% of non-working or part-time working moms with children under the age of five in Ohio said they would go back to work or work more hours if they had access to child care at a reasonable cost. (See Appendix C, [Public Opinion Strategies, Ohio Statewide Poll Key Findings](#))^y

Figure 1: Moms Need Child Care to Work

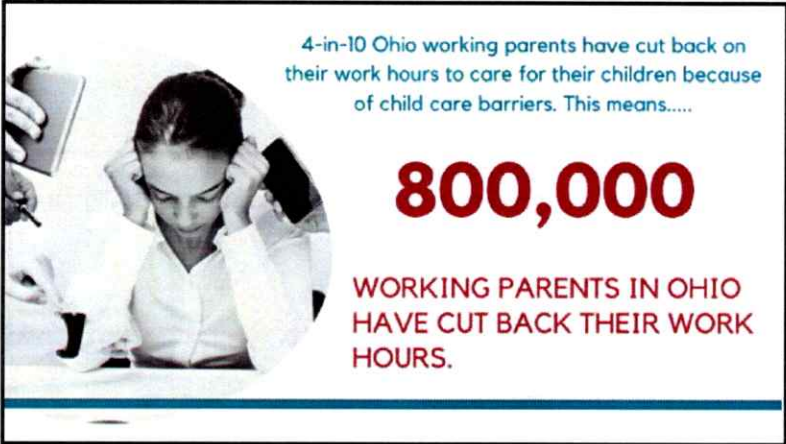


The poll indicates that parents believe the pandemic has made it harder to both access and afford care for their children. The lack of investment in Ohio’s young children in both child care and preschool impacts Ohio’s ability to attract new business investment across the state. Right now, Ohio parents are forced to choose between taking on full-time employment because they cannot afford the high cost of child care.

Figure 2: Child Care Wait Lists



Figure 3: 800,000 working parents have cut back their work hours

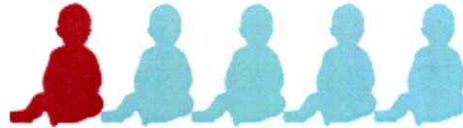


Given these alarming challenges of working parents and the recognition of these challenges by voters demonstrated through the poll, it is no surprise that **80% of voters and 87% of parents favor increasing funding in the state for child care and early learning programs.**

Expanding preschool opportunities in our state provides more than just a strong foundation in early learning for the child, it's also a needed workforce support for parents and overwhelmingly supported by voters.

Preschool investments must be done in tandem with investments in infant and toddler child care.

Less than 1 in 5
Ohio babies from families with
low incomes have access to any
early learning program.



It's important to also note that while Groundwork Ohio is extremely supportive of expanding access to preschool, our organization is also very concerned about the growing gap of child care availability for infants and toddlers. Currently, less than 1 in 5 Ohio babies from families with low incomes have access to child care.^{vi} We cannot solve our state's workforce crisis without investing in care and early learning birth through age five. It is imperative to invest in both preschool expansion and building capacity for infant and toddler care. This is why our organization is also recommending a **\$30 million new investment in infant and toddler child care.**

In conclusion, the expansion of the Early Childhood Education grant in House Bill 33 is one of many effective tools to increase opportunities for young children to meet their full potential and support families in the workforce. We encourage this subcommittee to consider the positive educational and economic impact that this legislation will have for families with young children.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions today or by email at lgutierrez@groundworkohio.org

Citations

ⁱ Groundwork Ohio Early Childhood Dashboard (2023)

ⁱⁱ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2022). *The State of Preschool 2021: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Preschool Programs and Service Levels*, Ohio Department of Education (September 2022)

^{iv} Note: There are no state funded Early Childhood Education grants for preschool in the following counties: Ashland, Carroll, Delaware, Geauga, Hancock, Henry, Holmes, Madison, Medina, Miami, Morrow, Noble, Shelby, Union, Washington, Wyandot. However, low-income children may be served by the federally funded Head Start program or private preschools utilizing Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care subsidy.

^v Groundwork Ohio Early Childhood Dashboard (2023)

MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: NEIL NEWHOUSE/JARRETT LEWIS/JAMIE WADOVICK GENTLE
PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
CC: SHANNON JONES, PRESIDENT & CEO, GROUNDWORK OHIO
SUBJECT: OHIO STATEWIDE SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS
DATE: MARCH 2, 2023

On behalf of Groundwork Ohio, Public Opinion Strategies completed a statewide survey of 800 registered voters and an oversample of 435 parents with children under the age of five in Ohio. The survey was conducted February 2-13, 2023 and has credibility interval of $\pm 3.95\%$ for the registered voter sample and $\pm 5.36\%$ for the parents oversample.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. *Early childhood education/child care are strong secondary issues on voters' minds.***
Four-in-10 Ohioans (40%) and more than one-half of parents with children under five (51%) rank the issue of making sure children get a strong start in life through quality early childhood education programs as extremely important. And, more than three-in-ten Ohioans believe helping provide child care for working parents with young children (32%) and lowering the cost of child care (30%) is extremely important.
- 2. *Ohioans, parents especially, are feeling the economic slowdown.***
Nearly one-half of Ohioans (45%) and parents with children under five (47%) rate their own financial situation as only fair or poor. And, over a quarter of parents with children under five (27%) share they have been having serious problems paying their rent or mortgage. More than 4-in-10 parents with children under five (41%) share they are having serious problems paying their credit card bills over the last few months.
- 3. *For Ohio parents, child care is difficult to access and afford.***
Most parents with children under five (55%) believe child care is difficult to find, with a plurality of all Ohioans (46%) believing it has become harder to access child care since COVID-19 started. Further, most parents with children under five (52%) believe it has gotten harder to afford and access quality child care in the last year. When it comes to the cost of child care, Ohioans (84%) overwhelmingly believe child care is expensive.
- 4. *Ohio parents are struggling to afford child care and put food on the table.***
Nearly one-half of Ohioans (47%) are concerned about being able to put enough food on the table over the next year, with fully 58% of parents with children under five sharing that concern. Further, a majority of these parents (56%) say they are having issues accessing high quality child care. In fact, nearly three-quarters of parents with children under five (72%) are either concerned about being able to put enough food on the table over the next year or are having issues accessing high quality child care.

5. *Problems with child care are having an economic impact.*

Nearly 4-in-10 working parents with children under five (38%) say they have had to miss work, leave early or lose focus because of challenges with child care. Further, almost one-third of working parents (32%) say they have lost more than five days of work in the past two years because of a lack of child care. And, among all Ohio working parents 4-in-10 (40%) have cut back on their work hours to care for their children. Putting this into real numbers using Census data, this means over 800,000 working parents in Ohio have cut back their work hours.

6. *Ohioans acknowledge serious staffing shortages at child care facilities as a problem, with many saying their child has been wait-listed for a spot.*

More than two-thirds of Ohioans (69%) say that local child care facilities in their area are having “serious staffing shortages.” Further, a majority of parents with children under five (52%) say they or someone they know are on the waitlist for child care, and more than 4-in-10 (45%) of those parents on a wait list say they have been on it for more than six months.

7. *There is a clear connection between the state’s economy and child care.*

When parents without child care are asked what would they be able to do if they had it, the dominant responses are “work more” and “get a job.” And, parents who have child care agree that child care allows them to “work more.” Further, fully two-thirds of Ohio moms with children under five who do not currently work full time (68%) say they would go back to work if they had access to high quality and affordable child care. Clearly, parents believe that child care allows them to work more, provide for their families and be productive members of Ohio’s economy.

8. *The support for increasing funding in Ohio for child care is broad and deep.*

Fully 8-in-10 Ohioans (80%) and nearly 9-in-10 parents with children under five (87%) believe the state should increase funding for child care. Even across party lines this support remains high, with nearly 7-in-10 Republicans (69%), over three-quarters of Independents (78%) and nearly all Democrats (92%) wanting to see an increase in funding.

BOTTOM LINE

Ohioans are still feeling the economic slowdown. In an environment where labor shortages continue to be pervasive across the state/country, child care remains an economic issue. With nearly half of parents with children under five (47%) experiencing only fair or poor financial situations and Ohioans overwhelmingly believing it is expensive, affording child care becomes remains a significant barrier to further workforce participation.

Those who don’t already have child care are running into issues accessing it. With serious staffing shortages taking place at Ohio’s child care facilities, most parents with children under five say they or someone they know is on a waitlist—with nearly half of them (45%) saying it’s a waiting period of more than 6 months. But, even those working parents who do have child care are having issues at work because of lack of child care coverage. They miss work, leave early, take days off, or cut back hours to care for their children.

Ohioans clearly understand and see the need for child care from an economic standpoint. They readily make the link between increasing access to child care and improving the state’s economy.

_____ moved to amend as follows:

1 In line 129687, delete "\$114,216,789 \$114,216,789" and
2 insert "\$137,216,789 \$137,216,789"

3 In line 129699, add \$23,000,000 to each fiscal year

4 In line 129721, add \$23,000,000 to each fiscal year

5 The motion was _____ agreed to.

6 SYNOPSIS

7 Department of Children and Youth

8 Section 423.10

9 Increases GRF ALI 830407, Early Childhood Education, by
10 \$23,000,000 in each fiscal year.

