



**Ohio House of Representatives  
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
House Bill 33  
Julie Stone  
Executive Director, Ohio Head Start**

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

My name is Julie Stone, and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the Ohio Head Start Association. For the purposes of this testimony, when I refer to Head Start, I am referring to the Head Start preschool programs that serve 27,000 three to five year old children, and the Early Head Start programs that serve 6,500 infants, toddlers and pregnant women throughout Ohio. In Ohio, the Head Start community includes sixty provider agencies, with over 8,000 staff serving children in nearly 500 licensed centers.

**Head Start and Early Head Start provide child-centered, family focused, comprehensive community-based services to vulnerable children and families.** Because Head Start is federally funded through grants that come directly to local providers, many people are not aware of the critical role Head start plays for Ohio's zero to five population and their families.

Head Start is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States and provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, dental, mental health, social services and parent engagement opportunities to low-income, special needs and at-risk children and their families, and is preparing Ohio children for success in kindergarten, school and life. Head Start's proven model of comprehensive support for children and families experiencing poverty is foundational to Ohio's Early Care and Education ecosystem.

Half of Ohio's Head Start providers operate Early Childhood Education slots funded by the Ohio Department of Education, and one third operate Publicly Funded Child Care slots funded by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Head Start promotes the school readiness of children from families whose income is less than the Federal Poverty Level. Families and children experiencing homelessness and children in the foster care system are also categorically eligible, and Head Start services are uniquely available to children with disabilities and other special needs.

Head Start and Early Head Start services are provided in a variety of settings including centers, family child care, and sometimes the child's own home. The federal to local grants are administered by Community Action Agencies, Private and Public Non-Profits, School Systems, and Universities. Our

programs also engage parents or other key family members in positive relationships, with a focus on family wellbeing, and parents participate in leadership roles, including having a voice in program operations.

**We urge you to invest in Ohio's young children and leverage Head Start to build more quality capacity to support the unique needs of infants and toddlers by investing in Early Head Start by:**

- Investing in Early Head Start by supporting Reps. White and Humphrey's amendment to pilot the development of quality comprehensive care in communities by investing \$6 million in Early Head Start with a prioritization of Appalachian, rural, urban and other communities where there are high rates of infant mortality and shortages of access to quality child care to serve more infants, toddlers and their families at risk of or engaged in the child welfare or foster care systems.
- Recognizing Head Start and Early Head Start as an alternative pathway by allowing reciprocity for Head Start and Early Head Start to Step Up to Quality Head Start Programs and contracted family child care partners are required to comply with Head Start Program Performance Standards at a level of quality that exceeds the Step Up to Quality's definition of high quality. Creating a practical alternative pathway for Head Start and NAEYC Accredited centers into SUTQ would save money and time by reducing the administrative burden on programs and the state. Many of our 60 Head Start providers also engage in Child Care Partnerships. For example, more than one quarter of our Early Head Start moms and children are served through partnerships. The Head Start program enters into an arrangement with a community-based center or family home Child Care provider where the partner is supported with resources such as funds, highly qualified staff, technical assistance, coaching, supplies and/or materials to provide services that comply with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.
- Designating the Early Head Start Home-Based Option as an approved home visiting model in Ohio. Head Start and in particular Early Head Start are recognized as the gold standard of comprehensive, multi-generational, family centered early childhood services and as foundational to Ohio's Early Care and Education ecosystem among administration, legislature, state bureaucracy, and partners, yet Early Head Start is not an approved home visiting model in the state. The Early Head Start Home-Based option is designated as an approved model for Maternal, Infant and Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Leverage Early Head Start resources and relationships to ensure access to comprehensive and innovative Infant/Toddler services for Ohio families
- Fully integrating Early Head Start as part of Central Intake and referral system in Ohio.

Investing in young children strengthens Ohio's workforce today and tomorrow. The lack of investment in Ohio's young children and child care leaves Ohio's young children behind and jeopardizes our future workforce. According to the Ohio Department of Education, only 38% of Ohio kindergartners entering the classroom ready to learn, and only 38% of Ohio students proficient in 8th grade math, workforce readiness is in jeopardy. Given these numbers, it should be no surprise to any of us that most children aren't ready to learn given that only about half of eligible low-income children ages 0-5 under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level able to access any state funded child care, preschool or Head Start.

Ohio must take action by:

- Making significant investments in infant & toddler child care.
- Increasing proposed funding for preschool.
- Increasing publicly funded child care eligibility to 160% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- And creating the Department of Children and Youth.

Head Start has a long and deep history of commitment to quality, and has a proven track record of achieving positive outcomes for Ohio's children and families in greatest need. Our role as a foundation of the state's Early Care and Education system is crucial to the success of all of Ohio's children and we stand ready to find ways to build on the strength of our foundation on that behalf.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Please reach out to me if you have any questions about the content of this testimony.

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