



**Interested Party Testimony- Senate Education Committee
Am. Sub Bill 33- State Operating Budget
May 10, 2023**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee - Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Amended Sub Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, in support of The Childhood League Center's funding request which would appropriate \$250,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Education's Educator Preparation appropriation line to provide intensive early intervention and educational services in Franklin County, services and training for providers and families serving children with developmental delays statewide, and to support the Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters (PLAY) Project at The Childhood League Center and in underserved counties.

My name is Ginger Young and I am the Chief Executive Officer of The Childhood League Center.

The Childhood League Center was founded in 1945 by a group of visionary women in Columbus, Ohio to help children in need. The Center serves children birth through preschool who have developmental delays or are at risk for developmental delays through family-centered, individualized services for children. The Center provides comprehensive services and work side-by-side with families to help each child develop to their full potential.

The services provided by The Center are critical to the advancement of children with developmental delays or those who are at risk for developmental delays. With high-quality early childhood education, children are less likely to be held back, be reliant on public assistance, and engage in criminal behavior. Conversely, those children are more likely to be kindergarten ready, graduate from high school, and have higher earnings and better health outcomes. Research shows that high-quality, birth-to-five early childhood education provides a higher rate of return than preschool alone – a 13% return on investment.

Beyond our work at The Center, we provide support and training for providers and families serving children with developmental delays statewide. One of these interventions is the Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters (PLAY) Project. The PLAY Project was developed at the University of Michigan and has now become a nationally and internationally recognized model of autism early intervention. Just a few weeks ago, the CDC issued new statistics showing the prevalence of autism is up from 1 in 44 children to 1 in 36 children. Now more than ever it is critical to invest in our children.

In 2009, The PLAY Project Organization was awarded a \$1.85 million grant through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to examine the efficacy of the intervention services. Altogether, 128 children were recruited for the study – making it the largest study on autism intervention in the United States. PLAY Project Consultants made monthly home visits, coached parents on how to engage using PLAY Project principles, methods, techniques, and activities, and provided monthly video and written feedback.

The difference between this intervention and other interventions for autism is that it works particularly well for very young children. Children can be diagnosed with autism as early as 14 months. PLAY is shown to be successful with this age bracket. A child's brain is 90% developed by the time they turn five. This is the most critical time for their development especially for a child with a developmental delay like autism. It is not uncommon for children who use the PLAY Project under five to enter into school with mitigated traits sometimes not even requiring an IEP. This early intervention can change the trajectory of a child's life.

The key findings from this study found that when parents successfully engage their child, the child makes progress in their social interaction and development, and autism symptoms improve. The study found PLAY Project children markedly improved their ability to interact, be social, and substantially reduced their autism symptoms. Additionally, PLAY Project parents significantly improved in their abilities to sensitively respond and effectively engage their child.

In 2016, The Childhood League Center became the first licensed PLAY Project Center in the nation. Through our training efforts to increase Ohio Counties access to PLAY Project consultants or resources during the past two fiscal years, the Childhood League has reduced the number of Ohio counties without access to services from 26 in May 2019 to 16 in June 2022. Additionally, during our first year of offering trainings in Teaching PLAY, using PLAY Project interventions in the classroom, The Childhood League Center trained 33 educators from Ohio. Parents and educators benefit from PLAY Project, helping to connect with the children of our future.

Teaching PLAY gives teachers critical tools to manage their classrooms, so that a child on the autism spectrum can fully and effectively participate and learn in the same classroom alongside children who are typically developing. We all know the challenges teachers can face managing a classroom with just one child who can disrupt the balance, Teaching PLAY strategies and interventions is an important tool in helping teachers maintain a healthy learning environment for all children.

I respectfully ask you to support our amendment and include \$250,000 in each fiscal year in the Ohio Department of Education's Educator Preparation line to support The Childhood League Center and our work.

I can take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you.

Ginger Young
Chief Executive Officer
The Childhood League Center