



**Ohio Senate
Health Committee – RE: HB-33**

**Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood Written Testimony
Submitted May 10, 2023**

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for your time and attention considering the following state-budget-related requests from the Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood – Invest in Children.

We are appreciative that the budget process in the House maintained the Governor’s proposed increase in initial eligibility for publicly funded childcare to 160 percent of the FPL and maintained the creation of an Ohio Department of Children and Youth. These are two important and needed investments, and we ask that you maintain them in this chamber’s version of the budget. However, we are very concerned that three items of critical importance to the health and welfare of young children and their families were reduced from amounts proposed in the Executive Budget, and we ask that you reinstate them.

We ask that \$18 million in funding for the Help Me Grow Home Visiting Program be reinstated.

A \$43 million increase in funding over the biennium for Help Me Grow home visiting was in the Executive Budget, but that increase suffered a nearly 42 percent reduction in the House. The Governor’s proposed increase was cognizant of the fact that while Ohio’s evidence-based home visiting programs served 10,707 families in 2021, that number reflected only small fraction of the families who needed these crucial services. In 2019, only 16.9% of the families who needed home visiting services received them – or less than 1 in 5. The Help Me Grow program currently serves 5,000 more families than it did then, yet we are still serving far less than the number of families who need the services.

Home visiting programs are a proven prevention strategy to promote positive outcomes for babies, mothers, and families, including: improving maternal and child health, preventing child abuse and neglect, increasing family education level and earning potential, and more. In previous testimony provided by Groundwork Ohio, they noted that studies have demonstrated that home visiting is highly cost-effective, with a return on investment of \$1.80 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent.

Restoring the \$18 million removed by the House and bringing Help Me Grow funding back to the that which was proposed in the Executive Budget is the right thing to do for Ohio families, and at the right time.

Secondly, we ask that \$10 million in funding for early childhood mental health be reinstated.

Currently, the mental health needs of Ohio children are not being met. Anyone questioning that, only need watch the evening news for confirmation. The Governor's budget included a \$20 million investment over the biennium towards increasing early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultation services. ECMH consultation provides early childhood educators with specialized professional development and ensures they are prepared to care for children requiring significant levels of extra support – including many who have a history of trauma and or abuse. Recent referral trends include increased aggression towards other kids and adults, self-harming behaviors, and suspected or diagnosed autism. During the House budget process, the Governor's proposed amount was reduced by 50 percent and \$10,000,000 was removed. Particularly puzzling about this move is that it comes at time where there is widespread recognition that our young children and youth are facing mental health challenges at levels never before seen. Recent data shows that 1 in 5 children in Ohio are experiencing a mental health condition – yet less than half of those children receive treatment.

In Cuyahoga County, our ECMH system provides both in-classroom and in-home consultation. Currently more than 125 children are waiting for services, and the most recently added family can expect to wait up to 6 months before being seen by a trained and licensed provider. When considering that 80 percent of brain development is finished by age five, 6 months is an eternity to wait for help. Also in Cuyahoga County, 4 of the 6 contracted behavioral health agencies that provide ECMH consultation services are currently unable to accept new referrals due to workforce shortages. All of this is happening while a recent poll conducted by Groundwork Ohio, showed nearly 7 in 10 Ohio parents with children under the age of 5 said that they were worried about the mental or emotional health of their children.

The full \$20,000,000 proposed by the Governor is needed to expand access to currently under-resourced services that contribute to positive outcomes for these children and promote better mental health as they transition into their teen-age years and adulthood.

Lastly, we ask that the \$150 million of ARPA funding in the original version of HB-33 for childcare scholarships and development of additional capacity in available infant-toddler care, be reinstated. We must support the workforce and agencies that enable many Ohioans to go to work each day. Availability and cost of care are the two biggest barriers for families seeking childcare. If parents cannot find care, they cannot reliably show up to work. If they are not confident their child is well cared for in a supportive and enriching environment, they cannot focus their attention on work.

Statewide, and locally in Cuyahoga County, families with infants and toddlers struggle to find childcare because there are simply not enough seats to serve the needs. Individuals working in critical and direct care occupations—including child care professionals themselves—provide invaluable services to our communities and are often paid at relatively low wages. Ohio must make substantial investments in supporting these essential workers, while simultaneously working to build capacity in available care.

In conclusion, with these investments reinstated, state government can partner with local government and local providers, to address these important and timely issues.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let us know now, or anytime, if you have questions or need of additional information.

FOLLOW UP CONTACT INFORMATION

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