

Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee
Chris Bennett, CEO Wonderschool
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Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Child Care Provider Recruitment and Mentorship Grant Program. My name is Chris Bennett, and I am the CEO of Wonderschool, a company dedicated to expanding access to high-quality early childhood education by equipping child care providers with the technology, mentorship, and business tools they need to succeed.

Ohio is facing a well-documented shortage of child care providers, particularly in rural areas and child care deserts. Families are struggling to find care, which has a direct impact on workforce participation and economic growth. Addressing this challenge requires not just recruitment, but a modern, technology-driven approach that helps new providers start and sustain their businesses.

We know this approach works because we've done it before—most notably in Michigan. As part of Michigan's statewide effort to expand child care access, Wonderschool was engaged in a 12-month pilot program to recruit and support new in-home providers. Using a technology-enabled approach, we exceeded the state's targets in just 9 months—accelerating child care creation faster than anticipated and expanding access in communities that needed it most.

In-home childcare offers unique flexibility that center-based care often cannot match, making it an ideal choice for many families, including those with children with disabilities or delays, or specific cultural or linguistic needs. With smaller group sizes, home-based providers can tailor schedules, activities, and routines to better fit each child's needs, including accommodating non-traditional work hours and individualized care plans. This personalized approach fosters strong caregiver-child bonds and a home-like environment that supports emotional and developmental growth. While center-based care provides valuable structure, socialization, and resources, in-home childcare complements these benefits with a more adaptable, intimate setting that meets the diverse needs of today's families.

The Child Care Provider Recruitment and Mentorship Grant Program represents a similar opportunity for Ohio. By leveraging software-driven solutions, this program will:

- **Accelerate Provider Recruitment and Licensure:** Just as we did in Michigan, we will use digital platforms to streamline the process of identifying and supporting new in-home licensed child care providers, significantly reducing the time it takes to get them operational.
- **Provide Business and Licensing Support at Scale:** The use of software allows new providers to navigate the complexities of licensing, business planning, and financial management with ease—ensuring higher success rates and long-term sustainability.

- Enable Data-Driven Decision-Making: Ohio will gain valuable insights into where child care deserts exist, how demand fluctuates, and what interventions are most effective—all through real-time digital tracking and reporting.
- Ensure Long-Term Sustainability: Unlike one-time grant initiatives, this program provides ongoing access to business management tools, allowing providers to remain financially viable and meet the needs of families for years to come.

A \$3.2 million investment in FY26 in this program is a proven model for success. If Ohio follows the blueprint that worked in Michigan, it can expect not only to meet but to outperform expectations in expanding child care access quickly and efficiently.

On behalf of Wonderschool and the many providers we serve, I urge this committee to support this program. Ohio has a chance to take a forward-looking approach—one that leverages technology, data, and direct business support to create a stronger, more sustainable child care system.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.