

February 25, 2025

Ohio House of Representatives
Children and Human Services Committee
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Ohio House of Representatives Children and Human Services Committee Hearing for the Department of Children and Youth Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Budget

Dear Chairwoman White and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for your commitment to ensuring access to high-quality early care and education for our youngest learners. The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) is a national nonprofit that is comprised of the leading high-quality multi-state, multi-site child care providers, state child care associations and education service providers. Collectively, our members operate over 7,250 child care centers nationwide, serving over one million children. In Ohio, ECEC members operate 327 centers employing about 8,000 educators and staff, with the capacity to serve nearly 47,000 children.

I want to thank the Department of Children and Youth and the Ohio Statehouse for their continued efforts to address the needs of child care providers operating in Ohio. I also want to thank the Committee for its hard work to improve the Department of Children and Youth's processes, in part by ensuring they have the resources, policies and guardrails in place to improve their systems and increase efficiencies.

As the Committee works on the H.B. 96 Biennial Budget Bill, we urge members of this Committee to support and take steps to:

I. Safeguard Stable Predictable Sustainable Care for Families: Funding Based on Enrollment, Not Attendance

Moving to a funding system based on enrollment instead of attendance stabilizes the Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) system. This recognizes the fixed costs in providing child care and supports the workforce with predictable employment. Accountability measures should be included to prevent fraud. H.B. 96 includes this in Fiscal Year 2027, and we support the measure. In the public-private partnership of Ohio's birth to 12 system, this provides parity of payment in both schools and early education programs.

II. Rebuild and Retain the Child Care Workforce: Pilot Free Child Care for Child Care Workers

While wage inflation has increased the salaries of child care workers, increases in cost-of-living expenses and a competitive market for qualified employees make it challenging to attract and retain qualified teachers. To ease those challenges, we support creating free child care for child care workers, like Kentucky and Michigan have implemented. This will attract workers who want to work but have young children and cannot afford to pay for care and



work in the sector. This could be a pilot for a certain number of workers who are ineligible for subsidies to receive a voucher amount for childcare if they are working in a child care program.

III. Modernize and Streamline Regulations to Focus on Health and Safety: Create an Appeals Process

Inspections across the state vary in terms of severity, sometimes resulting in onerous and unfounded violations after which the provider has little recourse. We need a system where the provider has a voice so they have an opportunity to defend themselves if they believe the violations are unfounded. Creating an evaluation process also ensures that the Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) program maintains high-quality standards. A formal appeal process could enhance the licensing and quality process by involving experienced professionals who thoroughly assess a facility's safety measures, curriculum, staff qualifications, and overall quality of care provided.

IV. Ensure that Child Care Providers Have a Voice in Policy Discussions

In late 2024, the Child Care Advisory Committee language was removed from statute. This group included a balanced membership of stakeholders in the child care space, including frontline providers. While we understand the Department of Children and Youth intends to structure subcommittees under the statutory Early Childhood Advisory Committee, the voice of those on the front lines taking care of and educating children need a voice in the policy discussion so decisions are practical and implementable.

V. Allow Alternative Pathways for Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)

H.B. 7 passed in 2024 and included two research-based accreditations to be considered as alternative pathways for SUTQ, recognizing that national quality standards and accreditations that are substantially equivalent to SUTQ should be deemed in compliance. We respectfully ask the following to be added:

- **Cognia**
- **NECPA:** National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
- **NAFCC:** National Association of Family Child Care
- **NACCP:** National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs
- **COA:** Council on Accreditation
- **ACSI:** Association of Christian Schools International

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please feel free to contact ECEC@ECEConsortium.org with any follow-up questions.

Respectfully,

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