



The House of Children and Human Services Committee

The Ohio Association of Child Care Providers represents the Directors and Business Owners of over 600 licensed child care centers. Our members educate and care for over 50,000 of Ohio's youngest citizens, including private pay and publicly funded children, who are served in faith-based, for-profit and non-profit programs. The OACCP organization has been a driving force as it pertains to improvements in the area of licensing and SUTQ regulations, working with initiatives the Department of Children and Youth may institute, and then ensuring that the voices of Ohio providers are heard through participation in meetings throughout the Biennium Budget and/or regulatory processes.

With the understanding of our representation, it is important that our membership shares what is important to the House of Children and Human Services Committee regarding the children and families of Ohio for the next budget to help with the success of children, families and the economy of Ohio.

First and foremost, to maintain open/available childcare centers, it is necessary to have Stable Predictable Sustainable Care for Families. Currently, funding is based on attendance not enrollment. Centers income is not predictable due not receiving 100% of PFCC income due to attendance. Generally centers only receive 75% PFCC annually due to absenteeism, sickness, and transient jobs. Moving to a funding system based on enrollment instead of attendance stabilizes the PFCC childcare system. This recognizes the fixed costs in providing childcare and supports the workforce with predictable employment. Accountability measures should be included to prevent fraud. HB 96 includes this in FY 27 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.

It is imperative to rebuild and retain the Childcare Workforce. Childcare is the workforce behind the workforce. When there are no childcare employees, then a center cannot run at full capacity. If a center cannot run at full capacity communities suffer economically because people cannot work due to lack of care. How do we rebuild and retain? Pilot free childcare for childcare workers. While wage inflation has increased salaries of childcare 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 childcare for childcare 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. This could be a pilot for a certain number of workers, not eligible for subsidies, who would receive a voucher amount for childcare if they were working in a childcare program.

Lastly, in order for centers to run efficiently and effectively with regard to the health and safety of all children in mind:

- 1. Modernize and streamline regulations.**

Create an appeals process. Inspections across the state vary in terms of severity, sometimes resulting in onerous and unfounded violations and 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 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.

2. **Ensure that childcare providers have a voice in policy discussions.**

In late 2024, the Child Care Advisory Committee (CCAC) language was removed from the statute. This group included a balanced membership of stakeholders in the childcare space, including front line providers. While we understand the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) 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 that decisions are practical and implementable.

3. **Allow alternative pathways for Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)**

HB 7 passed in 2024 included 2 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 • Cognition 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:

- NECPA: National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
- Cognition
- 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

4. **Incorporate a Peer Review Appeal and Evaluation Process**

A peer review appeal and evaluation process hold immense importance in both the "Step Up to Quality" (SUTQ) program and the licensing of early childhood education and care facilities. It serves as a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation method that contributes to the ongoing improvement and enhancement of childcare standards. Below are key reasons why the peer review process is crucial for both aspects:

- Quality Assurance
- Continuous Improvement
- Expert Input
- Professional Development
- Credibility
- Ensuring Safety and Quality
- Objective Evaluation
- Adapting to Changing Needs
- Transparency and Accountability

During this budget cycle, the importance of children and families has sat on the forefront of many Representatives and Senators along with Governor DeWine but mostly with the families of Ohio.

We are the workforce behind the workforce and it is our privilege to educate Ohio's children. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have.