



Testimony to House Children and Human Services Committee

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Provided by Brian Gutman

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On behalf of Learning Care Group (LCG), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96.

LCG is among the largest providers of high-quality early childhood education in the nation. In Ohio, LCG proudly operates 47 schools with several more in the pipeline under the Childtime, La Petite Academy, Pathways Learning Academy, and Tutor Time brands, serving more than 6,400 children and employing over 820 educators and staff members. Nearly 50 percent of children are served through the Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) program, off-base military care, and employer partnerships.

LCG applauds the commitment from the DeWine administration and Ohio General Assembly to supporting children and their families through the creation of the Department of Children and Youth (DCY). HB 96 provides critical state investments to make Ohio's early childhood education system as accessible and affordable for all Ohio families. As the General Assembly contemplates HB 96, LCG offers the following recommendations:

Enrollment-Based Payments

LCG supports the change in the PFCC program to paying providers based on enrollment in FY27. As required by the 2024 CCDF Final Rule¹, enrollment-based payments ensure providers can cover their fixed costs, including staff, facilities, and utilities, despite a child's occasional absence. This policy not only improves stability among child care providers serving children aged birth-12 through PFCC, but also encourages more providers to participate in the subsidy system, increasing parent choice.

Child Care Worker Subsidy Program

Rising costs of living and competition from other industries has further exacerbated workforce recruitment and retention challenges within the early care and education community. To address these challenges, we recommend Ohio consider a pilot program to provide categorical child care subsidy eligibility for child care workers, which would attract more educators to the field while easing their financial burdens. As other states, including Kentucky and Michigan, initiated similar programs, LCG has seen first-hand how free child care for child care workers can grow and stabilize the workforce.

Health and Safety Regulations

Inconsistent enforcement of health and safety and licensing regulations statewide creates additional challenges for providers, and the lack of an appeals process results in penalties without recourse. LCG recommends DCY implement a peer review appeal and evaluation process that would enhance both child care licensing and Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) by encouraging providers to maintain high standards and offering support in the event of an issue. Under this new appeals process, providers would be evaluated by experienced professionals who assess a facility's safety measures, curriculum, staff qualifications, and overall quality of care. Evaluating child care providers in this manner would increase the quality of early education and care options for Ohio's families.

¹ 45 CFR §98.45(m)(2)(i) (2024)



Provider Engagement

As DCY structures subcommittees within the Early Childhood Advisory Committee, LCG requests DCY ensure that providers of all sizes have a voice on the subcommittee. We were disappointed to see the Child Care Advisory Committee removed from statute late last year, which included stakeholder representation across the industry. Given the new Early Childhood Advisory Committee structure proposed in HB 96, it is imperative that providers have a direct role in policy discussions to ensure practical and implementable solutions.

Alternative Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Pathways

LCG is a proud participant in Ohio's SUTQ and appreciates the General Assembly's inclusion of two research-based accreditations as alternative pathways for SUTQ compliance. However, HB 7, which provided for these alternative pathways, did not consider other national accreditations commonly used in the field. By omitting these reputable accrediting entities from the list of alternative pathways, providers are unable to use their existing accreditation as a way to satisfy an alternative pathway for SUTQ, resulting in additional expenses for providers. Therefore, LCG respectfully requests for the following high-quality accreditation methods, among others, to be added to the list of acceptable, alternative pathways for SUTQ compliance:

- Cognia
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NACCP)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)

Thank you for your time and consideration. LCG looks forward to working with the DeWine administration and Ohio General Assembly to further strengthen Ohio's early care and education system.