

**Testimony submitted to the House Children and Human Services Committee
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Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 96. My name Carole Beaty and I serve as the Chief of Family and Workforce Programs at The Centers in Cuyahoga County. The Centers serves nearly 20,000 people at 11 locations throughout Greater Cleveland to provide access to integrated healthcare services, early childhood education, family support, and workforce development.

The Centers are supportive of many of the provisions in Governor DeWine's budget proposal that will benefit children and families in our communities, such as the creation of the new Child Tax Credit, continued investment in quality childcare access, and supports for multisystem youth. We also applaud the Governor for maintaining Medicaid funding levels for provider rate increases approved during the current biennium, continuing to prioritize the OhioRISE program for youth with complex behavioral health needs, and furthering the development of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model in Ohio.

As this committee considers the budget bill, The Centers is also advocating for additional investment in Northeast Ohio's working families through an innovative model we are helping to launch in partnership with Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) and Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). Later this year, our three organizations will be opening a new regional Early Childhood Education and Training Center (ECE Training Center) in Parma Heights focused on three key objectives:

- Addressing the gap in childcare options for working families;
- Supporting employers by removing barriers to the hiring and retention of working parents; and
- Providing solutions to the shortage and recruitment of workers into the high-quality childcare workforce.

Childcare is one of the largest expenses families face and limited supply of quality care may force parents to miss work or exit the workforce entirely, leaving families financially unstable, employers scrambling to fill jobs and young children missing opportunities to learn and grow. A recent study in Cuyahoga County estimated that our local economy misses out on \$646 million dollars every year as the result of inadequate childcare. Another survey showed that 7 out of every 10 childcare providers in the county report having low enrollment and only filling 75% of their capacity due to a lack of staff.

The new ECE Training Center aims to address these challenges by providing high-quality early childhood education, early literacy and workforce development opportunities for the region's aspiring early childhood educators. This initiative is part of a \$16 million project to replace CCPL's Parma Heights Branch Library. Within this facility, The Centers will operate 3 preschool classrooms, 2 mixed infant/toddler classrooms, an indoor large motor room, and private outdoor play areas for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Additionally, The Centers will provide early

childhood mental health services on site for children who struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties.

The ECE Training Center will also serve as a training facility for students seeking an Associate of Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education through Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). Tri-C students will receive practical experience towards their degree requirements by working at the ECE Training Center. Students receiving this experience will be better prepared to join the early childhood education workforce by gaining firsthand exposure to best practices by working side-by-side with The Centers' highly skilled staff. Aspiring early childhood educators will have also access to adult education services provided by CCPL's Aspire Greater Cleveland program that offers instruction, certification, and testing for adult learners pursuing their GED.

The Centers is advocating for an allocation of \$500,000 per fiscal year in the state budget bill to support this initiative. The requested funds will cover:

- Start-up operating costs, such as teacher salaries and training expenses, prior to reaching full enrollment and receiving reimbursement from ongoing sources such as Head Start and state publicly funded childcare (PFCC).
- Capacity building for our Early Childhood Mental Health program serving students at the new ECE Training Center location, as well as our five other five-star rated Early Learning sites.

From birth to age 5, children learn at a speed unmatched for the rest of their lives; and children who receive high-quality early childhood education perform better in STEM subjects through high school. However, quality early childhood education is increasingly challenging to access. In Cuyahoga County, there are six children for every one seat in a quality-rated early learning center. Organizations that provide early childhood education services today struggle to keep classrooms open because finding qualified candidates to fill vacancies is extremely difficult.

The requested funds will help address these challenges in Northeast Ohio by promoting workforce development opportunities to stabilize the childcare/early learning industry, expand childcare options for working parents, and provide children with early literacy and mental health resources needed to become kindergarten-ready.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.