

## Action for Children



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Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee,

Chairperson White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Areesha Hunter, and I am a Program Manager at Action for Children, a Child Care Resource and Referral non-profit organization headquartered in Franklin County. Our organization serves seven counties in central Ohio which include: Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway and Union. Our mission is to transform the lives of children by supporting, empowering and advocating for the adults who make the biggest impact on children's lives: their parents, caregivers and teachers so that, all children, nurtured by strong families and vibrant communities, have opportunities for quality early learning experiences that prepare them for success in school and life, is what brings me here this morning.

Our work spans a lot of what the governor has proposed in his budget, and for that we are thankful to this administration for prioritizing working families, children, and new parents. We applaud and agree there needs to be increased access to affordable, quality childcare for working families to 200% of the federal poverty level. And more support for quality early learning experiences that prepare children for kindergarten. Both of these need to be on the list of priorities for this budget cycle.

Today, I am here to speak directly on a portion of our work that focuses on the health outcomes for mothers and babies. Prioritizing critical investments in home visiting programs in Ohio's FY2026-27 state budget, House Bill 96, will not only make us a stronger state, but will uplift parents that need the most support during the most vulnerable and life-changing moments.

Help Me Grow Home Visiting at its core is support for mothers, caregivers with new babies, and families with young children. Last year alone, 109 families were served through Help Me Grow Home Visiting at Action for Children, receiving 2,039 home visits that help them nurture their youngest children from birth up to age three.

As someone who has spent 15 years in the work, I know firsthand how important it is to support young children and working families.

According to research from Help Me Grow, children who receive home visiting services score a whopping 25 percent higher on first through third grade reading and math achievement tests. And pregnant mothers who take part in home visiting are 48 percent less likely to have a child with low birth weight.

Increasing access to evidence-based home visiting programs will not only help children thrive but also boost Ohio's workforce and economy. I urge you to fully fund these initiatives to ensure every child gets the best start in life.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families.