



Ohio Association for the
Education of Young Children



Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee

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

Testimony Of:

Kimberly Tice

Co-Executive Director, Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (Ohio AEYC)

Regarding:

Governor DeWine's Executive Budget Proposal – House Bill 96

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on Governor DeWine's Executive Budget, HB 96

My name is Kimberly Tice, and I am the Co-Executive Director of the Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (Ohio AEYC). Ohio AEYC is a statewide professional association representing nearly 2,000 members and supporting the entire early childhood profession across Ohio. We advocate for policies that strengthen and sustain early childhood educators, who are critical to the learning and development of Ohio's youngest children.

Acknowledging the Work of the Department of Children and Youth

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) has undertaken a monumental task in consolidating and streamlining services to better support Ohio's children and families. Director Kara Wentz and her team have done an exceptional job navigating this transition, ensuring strong provider communication and maintaining a clear focus on what's best for kids. As Director Wentz often states, they are doing what's right for kids, and we commend their efforts.

Support for the Department's Budget and Key Investments

Ohio AEYC strongly supports the Department's budget proposal, particularly provisions that expand access to quality child care and invest in the early childhood workforce. We applaud the expansion of child care eligibility to 160% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), allowing DCY to regularly update the payment rates or cost of care base on market rate surveys, increased eligibility for the Child Care Choice Voucher program, and the \$1,000 child tax credit. These measures will help more families afford quality child care and improve financial stability for child care providers.

Prioritizing Workforce Solutions: Payment for Enrollment and Categorical Eligibility

While we support the above investments, two policy changes will have the greatest impact on stabilizing the child care system and addressing the workforce crisis:

1. Payment for Enrollment vs. Attendance – Moving to an enrollment-based payment model, rather than attendance-based reimbursement, will provide child care programs with predictable funding. Attendance-based payment leads to month-to-month financial instability, making it difficult for providers to offer competitive wages or maintain quality programming. Predictable funding allows for better staff retention and improved services for children. The Department has indicated they will transition to payment based on enrollment in year two of the budget as required for federal compliance, but we encourage efforts to accelerate this timeline to the extent practicable to provide quicker relief and stability to child care providers.
2. Categorical Eligibility for Child Care Workers – The child care workforce crisis is fueled by low wages, making it difficult for programs to attract and retain qualified educators. Ohio can address this by granting categorical eligibility for child care assistance to early childhood educators. Providing free child care for child care workers ensures they can continue in the profession while making a living wage, reducing turnover and increasing program stability. This is a workforce issue that directly impacts both the availability and quality of child care in Ohio.

Conclusion

Investing in the early childhood workforce is investing in Ohio's children and economy. We urge the legislature to support these critical workforce policies that will strengthen our child care system. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Ohio AEYC remains a resource and partner in advancing policies that support young children, their families, and the educators who serve them.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss this request, I can be reached at ktice@oaeyc.org or (419) 560-5531.