

**Ohio House Children & Human Services Committee
Ohio Business Roundtable – House Bill 96 Testimony
March 4, 2025**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and Members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today and express The Ohio Business Roundtable's support for the child care and workforce programs included in the state budget.

My name is Nikki Cooper, and I am the Vice President of Business Engagement and External Affairs for the Ohio Business Roundtable (OBRT), a statewide business association comprised of CEOs and Presidents of the top companies in the state. We currently have over 125 members, collectively employing over 600,000 Ohioans and generating a revenue of more than \$2.5 trillion, which contributes significantly to Ohio's economy.

Our membership includes industry leading companies representing over 20 Ohio industries, including—but not limited to—companies such as KeyBank and Huntington in the banking sector; American Financial and Nationwide in the insurance sector; Kokosing in construction; CareSource, Cleveland Clinic, and many of Ohio's children's hospitals in healthcare; The Ohio State University and Miami University in higher education; Owens Corning, The J.M. Smucker Company, and Procter & Gamble in manufacturing; AEP, Vistra Corp., and Marathon in energy and utilities, among others.

The Ohio Business Roundtable is committed to advancing policies that strengthen our state's economic and workforce development, reduce burdensome barriers for businesses, and foster an environment where companies can invest, grow, and compete in the global economy.

A key component of this effort is ensuring that Ohioans have the necessary support to remain in the workforce and pursue job opportunities without fear of losing public assistance or being unable to afford reliable child care. Businesses across Ohio are facing workforce shortages, and for many parents, the lack of affordable, high-quality child care remains a significant barrier to employment.

As the Committee considers ways to expand access to affordable and quality child care, it is equally important to support workers transitioning off public assistance toward financial stability. Many Ohioans experience the benefits cliff—a sudden loss of public assistance when their income marginally increases—creating a disincentive to accept raises or better job opportunities. This not only limits individual economic mobility but also hinders businesses’ ability to retain and promote employees.

Several programs included in the state budget are designed to mitigate the effects of the benefits cliff, providing critical support while encouraging financial independence for Ohioans. The Ohio Business Roundtable strongly supports these initiatives:

- The Benefit Bridge Pilot Program, administered through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), offers benefits calculators, financial literacy training, and mentoring to help workers navigate the transition to self-sufficiency. This program ensures that career advancement does not come at the cost of financial security.
- The Growing Rural Independence Together (GRIT) Program, launched in 2019, has been instrumental in combating poverty in Appalachia by developing a skilled workforce and stimulating economic growth. With a proposed \$5 million allocation, GRIT aims to expand its services to assist an additional 20,000 individuals, providing career guidance, training, and educational placements while collaborating with employers to promote wage growth and financial independence.
- The Child Care Choice Voucher Program helps working families who do not meet initial eligibility requirements for publicly funded child care but still need assistance. Eligible parents—who are employed, in education, or in training—may have an income up to 200% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$62,000 for a family of four). According to the Department of Children and Youth Services, this program has already enabled over 4,800 families to join or grow in the workforce within just 10 months.



In Ohio's dynamic labor market, addressing barriers to employment is essential. Initiatives like the state programs I've outlined not only empower individuals to advance their careers but also enhance businesses' ability to attract and retain talent. The Ohio Business Roundtable also encourages the legislature to continue thinking outside the box when it comes to child care, exploring innovative solutions and partnerships with the private sector to expand access and affordability. A few great examples include:

- House Bill 41, sponsored by Chair White and Representative Roemer, which creates a new state grant fund, training resources, an employer toolkit, and a learning lab to help businesses develop near-site child care solutions in partnership with providers. A \$10 million start-up innovation fund would provide grants up to \$750,000 to assist with equipping or retrofitting facilities.
- The Child Care Cred Program, proposed in House Bill 2 (Rep. Johnson) and Senate Bill 32 (Senators Reynolds and Schaffer), which would implement a tri-share model—allowing child care costs to be equally shared among the employee, employer, and state.

By investing in these programs and policies, Ohio can move from a state where the benefits cliff stifles opportunity to one where economic growth and workforce development thrive. The Ohio Business Roundtable urges the legislature to support these critical workforce solutions, ensuring a stronger, more competitive economy for the future.

Thank you for your time and attention to these important issues. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

