

Proponent Testimony for House Bill [96]
Children and Human Services Committee
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Rita Hallaveld, MSW

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 96. My name is Rita Hallaveld. I am a parent of a first grader in Columbus City Schools, and work part time as a Family Ambassador with another elementary school in the district. I hold a master's degree in Social Work and practiced for over a decade as a Licensed Independent Social Worker both in community and private mental health practice settings. I am here to ask that you support Ohio kids, families, and childcare providers by fully funding Ohio's public schools and including the childcare improvements outlined in Governor DeWine's executive budget, especially raising eligibility for childcare assistance for parents and reimbursing based on enrollment.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I lost my childcare for my 2 year-old. That program never re-opened and I struggled to find an affordable, high quality option. I finally did, but many early childhood providers have continued to close. I would not have been able to return to work without assistance, and as a single parent I still rely on that assistance in order to work when school is not in session. Yet if small centers and licensed home providers are not reimbursed by enrollment, they cannot stay open and we face a greater mental health and education crisis.

While early childhood care and education is a foundation for the rest of a child's life, continued support is crucial for K-12 educational success. Gov. DeWine's budget proposal still shortchanges our kids. Using 2022 costs makes no sense to me as a parent trying to budget for a household - how can it make sense for our schools? The Fair School Funding Plan funds schools more fairly by taking into account the different needs in Ohio's small towns, large suburbs, big cities, and rural communities.

I fought hard alongside many other parents and teachers to keep my child's school and others in my community open. I voted to have my property taxes raised to ensure that families like mine can have a fair shot at a quality education. Without fully phasing in the Fair School Funding Plan, my school district would lose enough money to cancel out the benefits promised by our school levy, including expanding preK programs. Already, schools sometimes close due to broken heating; children are missing school because buses are not

on time. Class sizes are maxed out and many of our public schools have waiting lists when the district cannot afford to hire more teachers. Other communities could be hit even harder when districts have to over-rely on property taxes. Half of Ohio's local school levies already failed this past cycle.

Every kid deserves a fair shot at a great education - for some that means different kinds of support. The state is constitutionally required to provide that to all kids. When quality childcare and K-12 education are out of reach for the majority of Ohioans, we all pay the cost. Higher poverty, crime, mental health, and the need for even more public assistance for families continues throughout the lifespan.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote yes to fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan. Additionally, please raise the eligibility for childcare assistance for families and implement reimbursement based on enrollment to childcare providers. What we invest now will result in exponential cost savings down the road and benefit all of Ohio for generations. Thank you.

Talking Points

For now, we want to stay away from talking about the “whichever is lower” reimbursement rate fix. It appears that it could go through without a fight since it is hard to understand. We will keep asking about this and let you know if this changes or if legislators start talking about removing this.

Going from an Attendance Policy to Enrollment Policy will now take the financial burden off of the businesses who have to eat the cost of employee pay and overhead costs when a client does not bring their child in for care. Running a small business in this industry is based on tight margins and we do not get into this industry to make millions of dollars. It is important to eliminate barriers to businesses that make it cost prohibitive when serving the needs of families who need childcare services.

It is important to point out that although this budget makes many strides in the right direction toward helping the childcare crisis in Ohio, we are still left with an extreme shortage of quality workers who are needed to fill the positions in our industry. Workers are the backbone of our industry and I hope that we look to smart solutions to engage more ways to bring about smart solutions to this growing problem.