

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee,

Good afternoon, my name is Cerita, and I reside in Reynoldsburg with my husband Lavelle and our 3-year-old son, also named Lavelle. We call him “Deuce” for his nickname. My husband and I are college sweethearts that met at Bowling Green State University in 2011. We moved to the Columbus area in 2019 after I completed my Master’s Degree in Education within School Counseling. We chose Columbus as a way to explore a new city together within our home state as I am from the Greater Cincinnati area, and he is VERY proud Cleveland native (and would remind you of this every chance he can as ALL Cleveland sports are a huge deal to him). Navigating parenthood has been extremely fulfilling, challenging at times, full of exhaustion, but more so full of pride and joy. Two of the things that my husband and I have learned to lean on are: partnership with each other, and within our community.

When we learned about Future Ready 5 within our childcare facility, Little Incredibles, it was no brainer for us to jump on board. Being that I work in education as a school counselor, I recognize and understand all too well the different challenges that affect students from different racial, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds, even as early as kindergarten. When I attended the first informational session with the CEO and COO and learned how Future Ready 5 thrives in addressing barriers for 0–5-year-olds, it left me feeling empowered and ready to make the changes I could, right in my own home. While I know so many wonderful educators that are extremely talented in the classroom, and I have a background in education myself, as a new mom, it’s still not easy to navigate on your own. They say “it takes a village” for a reason, and I knew I had found our village in this community.

Life is busy for all of us, and we are just trying to make it through the long days. I often leave work overstimulated and overwhelmed, but I look forward to family time. Being able to enjoy family time AND put the quick, easy, and researched-based educational resources that FR5 provides into practice, is like cracking a secret code! Future Ready 5 has been a blessing in helping us stay encouraged and positive at home. As I mentioned before, my husband and I lean on partnership. While he is more versed in the Khan Academy Kids technology subscription that FR5 provides for Lavelle, I make sure to tune in to the monthly evening workshops and use the fresh, rotating variety of free educational resources our FR5 kindergarten readiness coordinators provide for our family. I find myself hanging on every word they passionately share during the live workshops, and my heart swells with joy when I see Lavelle’s face light up knowing he can now recognize that “hook rhymes with book and look”. He’s also understanding dialogic reading concepts, and recognizing letter sounds more and more. I’m learning to make many educational things a game and I adore reading to him at night. The incentives outside of the educational resources, like recognizing our son’s attendance, participation, and hard work, sharing the data and growth that he’s made throughout the year, and even just the personalized gifts from FR5 for consistently putting in the extra effort are just more added bonuses. My husband and I were already inspired and knew that FR5 was an investment in our son’s future, but the thoughtful incentives help to display just how zealous this organization is when it comes to engaging with families and staying connected. Plus, knowing that I can always reach out to someone if I have questions or concerns is priceless.

All in all, I am overjoyed and extremely grateful for Future Ready 5. I appreciate all the time that is dedicated to helping families like ours. We hope to be a part of this community for a long time as we will be welcoming our 2nd child come August!

My request is that our representatives of Ohio will fund Future Ready Five for many, many years to come, for the sake of *my* children and all children in Central Ohio, from Cincinnati to Cleveland, and all the zip codes between. All children deserve to thrive, and no one can do it alone. It truly takes a village, and I’m grateful every day that our child care center chose Future Ready Five to be a part of our village. I hope FR5 can

continue to reach all centers, as well as those children who are *not* in child care centers, but as an educator, I know State funding is necessary to make that happen.

Thank you