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February 26, 2025

Testimony on House Bill 96

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 96.

My name is Michelle Scott, I run Michelle's Home Child Care Center and represent the CEO Project. I am here to ask that you support Ohio kids, families, and childcare providers by including the childcare improvements outlined in Governor DeWine's executive budget, especially on one of the most pressing issues addressed in HB 96 is the reimbursement rate shortchange, which has historically underfunded essential services. By fixing these discrepancies, we can ensure that providers are fairly compensated and that critical programs remain accessible to those in need.

The bill also raises Medicaid eligibility for families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), a necessary step in ensuring that more low-income families have access to healthcare.

This bill proposes eliminating state income tax cuts, which could provide financial relief to many Ohioans but also raises concerns about potential revenue shortfalls that could affect essential public services. Additionally, it opens the door to a cost model that may have long-term implications for budget sustainability and program effectiveness.

The bill also touches on fair school funding, an issue that is crucial for maintaining equitable education opportunities across the state.

However, the legislation doubles down on private school vouchers, which may divert necessary resources away from public schools that serve the majority of Ohio's children. However, beginning in 2026, the bill also introduced significant cuts to Medicaid, which could put the health and well-being of Ohio's most vulnerable populations at risk. Additionally, the proposed end to presumptive eligibility for publicly funded child care (PFCC) would create barriers for families seeking immediate assistance. Given the reliance on federal dollars, the long-term sustainability of these changes remains uncertain.

Finally, HB 96 includes changes to the State Child Tax Credit, which could have significant financial implications for working families. Ensuring that this credit is structured fairly will be key to supporting economic stability and upward mobility for Ohioans.

As a childcare provider in Franklin County, of Columbus City, Ohio, I believe the committee should consider my advice because my unique experience as a single mother of two children of color with ADHD has equipped me with a deep understanding of the complexities involved in navigating educational, social, and healthcare systems. This perspective allows me to advocate effectively for resources and support tailored to the unique challenges faced by families like mine, ensuring that we address both the systemic barriers and the individual needs of children with ADHD. By sharing these insights, I can help the committee make informed decisions that promote equity and inclusion for all families, which allows me to foresee potential challenges and opportunities that may not be immediately apparent. This combination of expertise and insight positions me to contribute effectively to informed decision-making and strategic planning.

As a business owner of a ODJFS Licensed FCC Program participating in the Step Up to Quality rating system that has been in business for nine years, I am eligible for public funding. I find the issue of reimbursement rate shortchange is critical, as it directly impacts the ability of service providers to deliver quality care and support their own families. Reimbursement rates do not align with the actual costs of providing services, it can lead to financial strain on providers, ultimately affecting the quality of care received by families and individuals. Ensuring fair reimbursement rates is crucial so that providers can deliver quality care while also providing for their own families. When providers are fairly compensated, they can allocate the necessary resources to enhance the services they offer, ultimately benefiting the families and communities they serve. This balance not only supports the well-being of the providers themselves but also fosters a healthier environment for those in need of

care, creating a sustainable system where both care quality and provider livelihoods are prioritized. Addressing this shortchange is essential to ensuring sustainable operations and equitable access to necessary services, particularly for marginalized communities. By advocating for fair reimbursement rates, we can create a more supportive and effective system that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved. This change would enable families to seek timely and appropriate care for their children, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and a more equitable healthcare system that supports those most in need. Raising the eligibility to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a necessary step in ensuring that more low-income families have access to healthcare, particularly for essential services such as ADHD appointments and medication. Many families struggle to afford the rising costs of healthcare, and by expanding eligibility, we can alleviate financial burdens and improve access to vital resources. I have served many families in the past and still currently do in my nine years, advocating for policies that eliminate state income tax cuts that disproportionately affect low-income households. We need to redirect crucial resources back into our communities, ensuring that families have access to the support and services they need. This commitment to equitable taxation is essential for fostering economic stability and enhancing the overall well-being of the families I serve.

My children, who both have ADHD, face unique challenges that require specialized support, including individualized instruction, therapy, and behavioral management in a structured environment. In a public and/or private school setting, these supports are more readily available through programs and resources that are designed for students with learning differences.

For children with ADHD, having access to personalized attention, a structured environment, and specialized resources is essential. Unfortunately, when schools are underfunded, these crucial services become stretched thin. Teachers, who already have large class sizes to manage, are unable to offer the one-on-one attention that my children need to thrive. This often leads to frustration and, at times, behavioral issues that could be mitigated with the right support.

Additionally, the lack of funding for programs such as special education services, behavioral therapy, and classroom aides further exacerbates the challenges my children face. Without the proper tools and resources, my children's ADHD goes unaddressed in the way it should, which not only affects their academic performance but also their social and emotional development.

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or challenges. Unfortunately, the way school funding is currently allocated seems to disproportionately harm families like mine, who are trying to ensure that their children with ADHD receive the support they need.

Unfortunately, private schools are often ill-equipped to provide the necessary accommodations, and the vouchers that redirect funding from public schools to private institutions don't address the real needs of children like mine.

Private schools, which may not be required to adhere to the same standards of inclusion and accommodations as public schools, often lack the trained staff, specialized services, and necessary resources to support children with ADHD. While some private schools may offer support, many others cannot properly address these needs, making it harder for my children to succeed. The focus on vouchers does not just impact the children who are leaving public schools but also places even more strain on the already underfunded public education system, which increasingly struggles to provide for students with disabilities.

Reliable child care is crucial to ensuring my children receive the care and support they need to thrive. Presumptive eligibility has provided my family with immediate access to childcare services, allowing us to better balance work and the unique needs of our children, particularly those with ADHD.

Ending presumptive eligibility would create unnecessary barriers for families like mine, who rely on these programs to support children with special needs. My children's ADHD requires a structured and supportive environment, one that takes into account their specific challenges and provides accommodations to help them focus and engage. Publicly funded childcare programs are often the only option that can meet these needs without placing a financial strain on our family.

Without presumptive eligibility, my family would be forced to navigate a lengthy and potentially uncertain process to access care, leaving us in a state of limbo. This could severely disrupt my ability to work and provide for my family, all while my children lose out on the crucial care and support they rely on to succeed.

The decision to end presumptive eligibility for publicly funded child care disproportionately impacts low-income families and those with children who have special needs, such as ADHD. Removing this access is an additional burden that families who already face challenges should not have to bear. I urge you to reconsider these policy changes and prioritize the well-being of children with ADHD and other special needs who rely on these critical childcare resources.

The State Child Tax Credit provides greater assistance to families like mine, who are raising children with ADHD. As a parent, I know firsthand how the additional financial challenges of raising a child with ADHD can strain a family's resources. While my children's ADHD requires specialized support, therapies, and educational accommodations, the cost of these services often exceeds what many families can afford. The State Child Tax Credit can help ease this burden and allow families to better support their children's needs.

Children with ADHD often require more specialized care, including behavioral therapy, tutoring, and potentially private schooling to ensure they thrive in an educational environment. These extra costs can be overwhelming, especially for working families who are already struggling to make ends meet. The State Child Tax Credit provides much-needed financial relief, helping to cover the additional expenses of supporting a child with ADHD and ensuring they have access to the necessary resources.

Expanding or supporting the State Child Tax Credit would help address these inequities, allowing families to have a little more financial breathing room. With additional funds, parents would be better equipped to pay for essential services such as therapy, tutoring, and other specialized programs that support children with ADHD in their academic and social development.

Additionally, the credit would contribute to reducing overall financial stress for families already coping with the day-to-day challenges of raising children with ADHD. It would also demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that children with ADHD and other special needs have the same opportunities for success and growth as their peers.

As we consider the full impact of HB 96, I urge the committee to carefully weigh these factors and prioritize policies that foster equity, sustainability, and the well-being of Ohio families. Thank you for considering these important issues and for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support in making a positive change for families in our state. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Michelle Scott

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CEO Project