

March 5, 2025

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:

My name is Rachel Konerman, and I am a parent, early childhood professional, and higher education faculty member from Cincinnati, Ohio. I am also the Public Policy Chair for the Southwest Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (SWOAEOYC). SWOAEOYC represents hundreds of early childhood professionals in Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, and sixteen surrounding counties. We promote high-quality learning for all children, and we believe that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.



We applaud Governor Mike DeWine's goal of making Ohio the best place in the nation to start and raise a family and his creation of the Department of Children and Youth, which shows our state's commitment to children's development and well-being. We also greatly appreciate the leadership of Director Kara Wenthe. Under Director Wenthe's leadership, the Department of Children and Youth has outlined key outcome areas in pursuit of long-term goals to support children and youth, empower families, and uplift communities. As someone who has worked in the early childhood field for over twenty years, I know firsthand how important it is to support young children and working families. I also understand how critical a consistent, responsive, and knowledgeable early childhood workforce is to positive outcomes for children and families. I am writing to urge you to prioritize critical investments in early care and education.

According to Groundwork Ohio, while Ohio has made progress in expanding access to early learning for families, the percentage of students who demonstrated readiness on Ohio's kindergarten readiness assessment decreased from the 2020-21 to 2022-23 school years. This highlights the importance of well-trained professionals in the field of early care and education. The quality of the early childhood workforce is the most critical contributor to preparing children for Kindergarten. We need well-trained professionals in the field of early care and education. During early childhood, a time of rapid brain development, it is not enough for children to be placed in the care of early care and education programs that employ just anyone. Children must be provided with enriching experiences by consistent, responsive, and knowledgeable early childhood professionals in an environment that supports their growth. The early childhood workforce thrives when key initiatives are supported, such as:

- **Increasing access to affordable, high-quality early care and education** for working families to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- **Implementing a refundable child tax credit for working parents** with young children.
- **Increasing access to evidence-based home visiting** programs, including expanding the Family Connects model statewide.

- **Investing and scaling community impact models like Cradle Cincinnati** to encourage collaboration between women, clinicians, hospitals, managed care, and other community partners to reduce infant and maternal mortality.
- **Strengthening early development and literacy support** by increasing state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, while also expanding access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives, including curricula grounded in the science of reading and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio.

To further build and maintain a workforce of dedicated early childhood professionals, we urge you to increase investments in early care and education and, specifically, to also invest directly in early childhood professionals by funding initiatives that make it easier for them to obtain an education, secure gainful employment, stay in the field of early care and education, grow in their career, and perform their essential work. Ohio can support the early childhood workforce by creating and supporting initiatives that:

- **Invest in effective early childhood professionals** to meet the growing needs of young children by improving payment practices to early care and education programs.
- **Enhance the competencies of early childhood professionals** by investing in technical colleges, community colleges, and universities to ensure higher education is affordable and accessible in Ohio.
- **Increase access to early childhood apprenticeship programs and other practice-based early childhood teacher education models** so early childhood professionals have clear career pathways and stay in the field.
- **Support students who are also parents pursuing credentials and degrees in early childhood education** by helping them afford early care and education while they complete their degrees and credentials.
- **Maintain and expand TEACH scholarships** for early childhood professionals working across all settings.
- **Embed a phased-in, profession-determined baseline of knowledge, skills, and competencies for early childhood professionals**, aligned with compensation and inclusive of the necessary funding and capacity-building supports to ensure existing and new early childhood professionals can succeed.
- **Provide free or reduced early care and education services for the early childhood workforce** so early childhood professionals can receive and afford the very services they provide.
- **Establish a tax credit or deduction for early childhood professionals** similar to what K-12 teachers receive.

These policies will help children thrive and boost Ohio's workforce and economy. I urge you to fully fund these initiatives to ensure every child gets the best start in life.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families. If you have any questions, please reach out.

Sincerely,

Rachel Konerman

Chair, Public Policy Committee

Southwest Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children

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