

Dear House Children and Human Services Committee Members -

I am writing to bring attention to a critical aspect of foster care that has the potential to significantly enhance the well-being of foster children—providing free Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) daycare for all foster children. Access to high-quality daycare is essential for their development and long-term success.

Additionally, there is a growing need to address the shortage of foster homes for infants and children under the age of five. Many prospective foster parents are unable to care for these younger age groups due to a lack of affordable childcare options, including before- and after-school care for older children. By offering free SUTQ daycare, we can alleviate this barrier and encourage more individuals to become foster parents for these age groups.

Infants and children under five face unique challenges that require a stable, nurturing, and structured environment during these formative years. Providing access to quality daycare will help create a foundation for their well-being and long-term success. Recent statistics show a significant number of children under five in Ohio's foster care system, which underscores the need for immediate action.

I propose providing vouchers for SUTQ daycare centers for foster children and removing income qualifications for foster parents, similar to successful programs like WIC and free school lunches. These initiatives have already shown positive outcomes and do not impose income restrictions on foster parents. By adopting a similar approach, we can not only increase the number of available foster homes but also strengthen the educational foundation for these children.

I understand that addressing these issues requires careful consideration, but I am confident that enhancing the foster care system in this way will positively impact our community. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the welfare of Ohio's children. I hope you will give serious thought to these suggestions as we work together to build a brighter future for our state's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,  
Michelle McManus