



**Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee
House Bill 41
Elizabeth Hibbs, Ed. D. Candidate
Early Childhood Education Alliance
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Chairwoman White, Vice Chairwoman Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about House Bill 41 and the significance of quality early childhood education in the workforce. I am Elizabeth Hibbs, the Director of the Early Childhood Education Alliance, also known as ECEA.

The Early Childhood Education Alliance is a nonprofit organization created from a unique partnership between the University of Mount Union, the City of Alliance, and Alliance City Schools.

ECEA diligently works to ensure ALL children have access to quality early childhood education and enter school ready to succeed. ECEA focuses on a two-tiered approach. By supporting the parents and connecting them with resources, we also support the children and their development. A key component of this approach is collaboration between families and local service providers, including other non-profits, childcare centers, local businesses, and community organizations.

In 2019, ECEA began implementing the (AEP) Alliance Employment Promise in collaboration with local business leaders and the Alliance Area Development. Via the AEP, participating businesses pay up to \$200 per child per month for the early care and education of their employees' children at any of the eight ECEA-supported centers of their choice, as all of the ECEA-supported centers are highly rated via Step Up to Quality system. Since its implementation, the four startup companies involved (Coastal Pet Products, Inc., MAC Trailer Manufacturing, Morgan Engineering, and Robertson Heating Supply) have served 47 children and 37 employees via the AEP. According to Jim Stout, owner of Coastal Pet Products, Inc., "This initiative not only supports working parents but also benefits companies by improving employee retention and recruitment. We are already seeing the positive impact of this program." 100% of participating Coastal Pet Products, Inc. employees have been retained.

Quality early education and care serve as effective workforce development solutions that positively impact both the workforce and the community, now and in the future. This is because quality childcare supports the current workforce while also preparing the workforce of tomorrow. Businesses in the Alliance area acknowledge the significance of investing in their existing employees, their community, and the future workforce.

Given that the AEP has been successfully implemented for over five years, ECEA has applied for the Department of Children and Youth's Early Care and Business Partnership Grant. Through this grant, ECEA aims to eliminate socioeconomic barriers, making high-quality childcare and education more accessible and affordable for families, allowing them to work confidently, knowing their children are well cared for and educated; to increase the number of families served by the AEP; to expand the number of businesses that can offer the AEP; and to extend childcare hours to include earlier and later shift coverage.

There are also goals for businesses, working families, and ECEA-supported childcare providers. These goals include helping businesses achieve increased employee attendance, greater productivity, and lower employee turnover; providing working families with better access to reliable, high-quality childcare that fits their work schedules; and ensuring childcare programs attain greater financial stability while experiencing less staff turnover.

House Bill 41 would establish grant programs to expand childcare capacity through employer-based and community initiatives, similar to the investments supported by the DCY grant program. As someone who has been involved in efforts to increase childcare accessibility and workforce support, I can personally attest to the powerful and life-changing impact these public-private partnerships have on addressing Ohio's childcare and workforce development needs. The AEP has made it possible for working families to remain in the workforce.

I would like to read a 2023 quote from one of our AEP participants, Ana Dulaney, who says, "Through the AEP, my husband and I both are eligible to receive a subsidy for childcare at ECEA-supported centers here in Alliance. The owners of MAC Trailer and Robertson Heating Supply are in support of allowing us both to participate, and we have been approved! From our employers, we will receive \$200 per child per month, from BOTH EMPLOYERS. We will get \$800 off a month over the summer. Beginning in the fall, the girls can be bussed from their school to their center, and the cost of afterschool care will be covered 100% by the subsidy provided by our employers.

I have never felt prouder to be a part of this community. These business owners allowing us both to participate in this program is so significant to us. We have such overwhelming gratitude to them for helping us. With their support, we will be able to afford child care so we both can continue to work and contribute to our organizations. Our kids will thrive in an educational environment where they can socialize with other kids and be safely cared for under the regulations of these centers. We are so excited and thankful for this next chapter, and it could not be done without the AEP." Ana and her husband, along with other AEP participants, remain employed to this day as a result of this program.

I appreciate your time, and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I respectfully ask that you support House Bill 41 so that other communities can implement public-private partnerships to meet their childcare and workforce needs. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Liz Hibbs
ECEA Director
(330) 829-1234 extension 1941
hibbsel@alliancecityschools.org