

January 21, 2026

Testimony regarding House Bill 647



Chair White and members of the Children and Human Services Committee:

On behalf of Learning Care, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 647. We appreciate the General Assembly's ongoing commitment to ensuring the integrity of Ohio's publicly funded child care system and share this priority. This bill as drafted, however, raises significant concerns regarding due process, clarity of definitions, and the potential for unintended harm to families and providers, without strengthening fraud prevention.

Learning Care is among the largest providers of high-quality early childhood education in the nation and throughout Ohio. Our 48 Childtime, La Petite Academy, Pathways Learning Academy, and Tutor Time locations in Ohio have the capacity to serve more than 6,700 children each day and employ nearly 900 educators and school staff. We proudly serve families of all income levels, including 45 percent of our Ohio enrollment who attend with the support of Child Care Financial Assistance. Additionally, we are among the largest national providers of off-base military child care, publicly-supported Pre-K programs, and partnerships with employers to improve the affordability and accessibility of child care.

Ohio already operates one of the strongest child care fraud detection systems in the nation. Statutory changes should be grounded in demonstrated need and crafted with precision to avoid destabilizing a system that thousands of working families rely on every day. Already, Ohio's system requires parents to verify their identity using unique credentials on a state provided device, captures a photo of the individual checking the child in or out, uses automated data analysis to flag anomalies or patterns that may indicate fraud, and includes ongoing state review of attendance records, photo logs, and system generated alerts. It provides multiple layers of verification and a reliable mechanism for detecting irregularities to ensure accountability for families and providers alike. Through existing administrative processes, the Department of Children and Youth have the ability to disqualify providers found to be engaged in fraud.

Despite this existing authority to take action against any providers engaged in fraud or other prohibited conduct, HB 647 would broaden the circumstances under which the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) may immediately suspend a child care license—effectively closing a program—based on having “reason to suspect” misuse of public funds. Without a definition what constitutes “misuse of funds,” the bill risks displacing families and reducing child care supply as the result of routine and minor billing errors, typical of large administrative systems, which are currently resolved efficiently through payment adjustments rather than punitive action. As written, a simple administrative mistake could trigger an immediate program closure, leaving families without child care and jeopardizing their employment and stability, leaving teachers without a job, and a community with reduced child care supply. The bill also applies the same emergency standard used when a

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child dies in care, creating an extreme and inappropriate equivalence that risks disproportionate consequences for providers and families alike.

Ohio's child care system depends on stability, clarity, and fairness. HB 647, as currently drafted, introduces significant risks for families, teachers, providers, and communities. Changes to payment practices should be narrowly tailored, evidence based, and designed to protect both families and providers. Safeguarding the integrity of Ohio's publicly funded child care system is essential, but reforms must be grounded in demonstrated need, clearly defined standards, and fair, transparent processes. As drafted, HB 647 risks unintended and disproportionate consequences that could jeopardize program stability, undermine due process, and disrupt care for thousands of working families who rely on consistent, high-quality child care.

We stand ready to work collaboratively with lawmakers and the Department of Children and Youth to strengthen program integrity in ways that are precise, evidence-based, and supportive of both families and providers. Ohio's child care system succeeds when accountability and stability go hand in hand, and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to that shared goal. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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