

NeFree Cook
CEO Project, Stakeholder

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Opponent Testimony on House Bill 647

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **opponent testimony** today on HB 647. My name is NeFree Cook I represent the CEO Project and I am also a stakeholder because I teach, I support, and I love Ohio children and families that I serve daily in a early educational learning facility in Cincinnati. I am here because I would like to be a voice for myself, the children I serve, the parents who can't get off work to travel to Columbus, and others in my field who just can't be here because life doesn't permit.

Having our businesses subjected to closure without any due process and under mere suspicion of fraud without proof undermines the stability of the early childhood education industry, the workforce, and our children. This bill States loud and clear we are ALL already suspected of fraud, so based on this bill alone all of our doors would already be closed, and thousands of Ohio children would be displaced with working families scrambling to find care putting Ohio children at undo risk. I have always considered myself a proud Ohioan, but there is nothing to be proud of nor is honorable about Legislation that is written to harm our most vulnerable population, our children. There is also nothing honorable about Legislation which targets a specific demographic of our communities, Black people who utilize PFCC in Black-owned childcare Centers. This Legislation also speaks volumes about the disconnect between politicians and the Ohio people. Where is the understanding for those Ohioans who must work 2 jobs, or work non-traditional hours, in order to try to make ends meet. Those Ohioans do not fit squarely in this HB 647 box. They rely on the ability to break up their childcare needs between 2-providers. Most childcare facilities are not open on weekends, we have had to scale back hours due to all of the budget cuts, most childcare facilities are not even open until 6pm anymore, they are closing at 5pm also as a means to combat continued budget cuts. These limited hours deeply affect the ability for families to work. The families I serve work in the care economy, meaning they work fast food restaurants, hospitality, in nursing homes those are not traditional working hours. Sometimes they have to be at work as early as 5am and as late as 11pm. This bill gives those families no concern nor consideration. This bill does not address the real issues plaguing Ohio's childcare system.

Ohio childcare ranks 31st in the nation, has the 3rd lowest eligibility at 145%, and is largely inaccessible and unaffordable. I ask that you put politics and money aside and stop HB 647 because it doesn't serve the best interests of our children. Thank you for your time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.