

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 647.

My name is Trina Averette. I have provided early care and education in Ohio for nearly 30 years. I am the owner of The Foundation for Creative Life and a proud member of the CEO Project. I operate a small business serving publicly funded families.

Let me be clear: I support accountability. I support compliance. What I cannot support is a system that increases enforcement power without clearly defined due process protections for educators.

Several years ago, I terminated a family from my program. The parent was upset and filed a false report with the county. The investigation determined the claims were unsubstantiated. But I was told directly that if I had not contacted the agency immediately, the outcome could have been very different.

Years later, that same parent apologized for making the false allegation.

Under HB 647, a false claim like that could destroy a small program like mine before I ever had a meaningful opportunity to defend myself. That is not accountability — that is instability.

Small business child care providers cannot operate under the threat of punitive action based on allegations without strong, transparent safeguards. Expanding fraud referrals without outlining clear administrative protections shifts risk onto providers who are already operating on thin margins.

Now let's talk about presumptive eligibility.

Presumptive eligibility gave providers assurance that if a family qualified, we would be paid. Counties can take up to 90 days to approve a PFCC client. We cannot carry 90 days of unpaid tuition. No small business can.

Without presumptive eligibility, we are forced to either:

Turn families away — which hurts working parents,

Or assume financial risk that could jeopardize our program.

That is not sustainable policy. That is cost-shifting.

The state has also discussed moving toward enrollment-based attendance — which mirrors how the private-pay market works. But if the state wants to mirror private-pay systems, reimbursement must reflect how child care businesses actually operate. We staff based on enrollment. We pay fixed costs regardless of daily attendance.

You cannot demand private-market stability while imposing public-system uncertainty.

If Ohio wants a strong child care sector, it must build policy that promotes growth — not fear. Stability and clarity allow us to hire, expand, and serve more families. Unclear enforcement and delayed payments discourage participation and reduce access.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider provisions in HB 647 that increase risk without strengthening due process and payment protections for providers.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.