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**Ohio House  
Finance Committee  
H.B. 96  
Lynanne Gutierrez, President & CEO  
Groundwork Ohio  
Week of March 10, 2025**

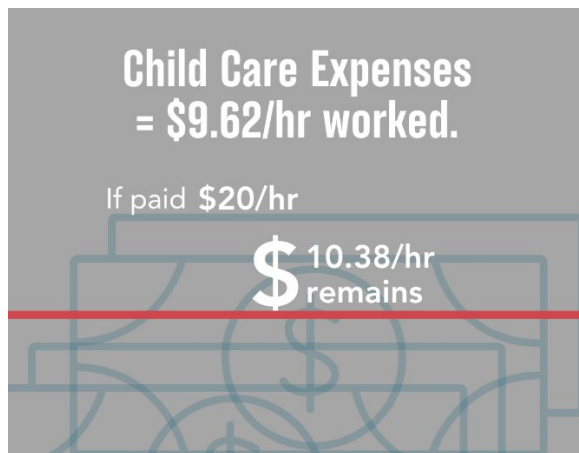
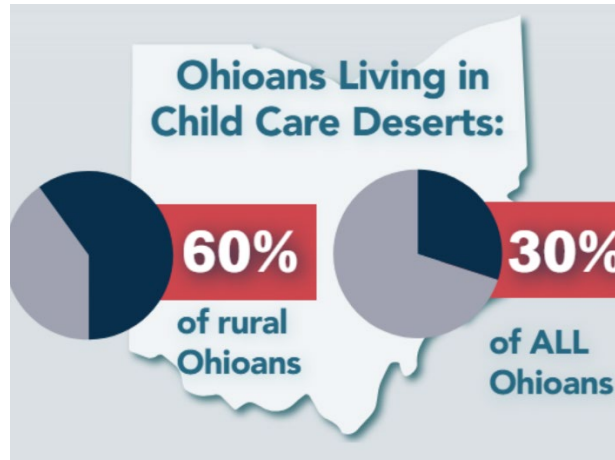
Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Lynanne Gutierrez, and I serve as the President and CEO of Groundwork Ohio. We are the state's leading early learning and maternal and young child health advocates, focused on the healthy development of young children, prenatal-to-five, and their families. We work with policymakers, business and community leaders, early childhood professionals, and families to advance policies that support the healthy development of young children to build a more prosperous future for Ohio.

We are testifying today because access to affordable, high-quality child care is not just a family issue—it is an economic issue that affects businesses, workforce participation, and the future prosperity of our state. Parents across Ohio are struggling to balance work and child care, often facing difficult choices that impact their ability to stay employed and financially stable. At the same time, child care programs are facing challenges in sustaining their businesses and meeting the growing demand for care. Without meaningful policy action, Ohio risks exacerbating labor shortages and hindering economic growth. **That is why we strongly support expanding publicly funded child care and enacting a refundable Child Tax Credit to provide much-needed relief to working families as proposed in House Bill 96.**

Ohio families are working harder than ever to provide for their children, yet too many are still struggling to make ends meet. Rising costs and financial uncertainty have made it increasingly difficult for parents of young children to stay in the workforce and contribute to our economy. The numbers tell a clear story:

- More than a third of parents with children five and younger (34%) report serious problems paying their rent or mortgage. Nearly half (47%) are struggling to pay their credit card bills. These are hardworking Ohioans trying to do the right thing, but they're finding it increasingly difficult to get ahead.

- Child care is a key driver of this financial strain. Almost half of parents (49%) say child care is difficult to find, and a staggering 73% agree that child care is simply too expensive. It is now one of the biggest expenses a family faces—exceeding the cost of housing or in-state college tuition.



Ohio's publicly funded child care program currently provides assistance to working families earning up to 145% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Only families who are employed qualify for assistance. The proposed expansion in HB 96 would increase eligibility to 160% FPL, ensuring more working families can access high-quality child care. Additionally, the proposal supports the Child Care Choice Voucher Program, which would provide assistance for families earning between 161% and 200% FPL. This expansion ensures that more parents remain in the workforce while supporting the economic stability of child care programs in a fiscally responsible way.

Ohio's economic future depends on a strong workforce. But today, too many parents are being forced to make impossible choices.



of Ohio working parents have cut back their work hours to care for their children.



That's 1 million people cutting back work hours due to child care barriers.



Parents with young children say they have **had to leave the workforce** because of an inability to find affordable child care.

These disruptions are not just personal hardships—they have a direct impact on Ohio's economy, exacerbating workforce shortages and slowing economic growth.



We know that investing in early childhood development is one of the smartest decisions we can make for our state's long-term economic success because high-quality early childhood education is the foundation for kindergarten readiness, ensuring children enter school prepared to learn and thrive. Unfortunately, most Ohio children are not ready to learn when they begin school (65% of all children), and this increases to 79% of low-income children. The disparity between low-income children and their higher income peers exists in every county in the state. Children who participate in high-quality early learning programs are more likely to be kindergarten ready, graduate from high school, and contribute to a stronger workforce in the future. Simply put, today's child care investments not only support families and the workforce of today, but shape the workforce of tomorrow.

Ohio has an opportunity to respond to what families are asking for, and Ohioans—across party lines—want us to act. Nearly 9-in-10 Ohioans (84%) believe the state should increase funding for child care to increase access, affordability, and quality. Notably, this support includes 77% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 92% of

Democrats. They recognize what so many Ohio parents already know: when families have access to reliable child care, they work more, earn more, and contribute more to their communities.

**61%**

of non-full-time working moms say  
**they would go back to work**  
if their child had access to  
quality child care at a reasonable cost.

Expanding publicly funded child care is the most direct and effective way to support working parents and ensure that Ohio businesses have the workforce they need. A robust child care infrastructure allows parents to reenter the workforce, increase their hours, and provide for their families without the constant worry of unreliable care. This investment pays off in the long run—producing a healthier economy, a stronger workforce, and greater opportunities for Ohio’s youngest learners.

To ensure this investment is effective, we must also support program compliance measures that prioritize families’ needs while strengthening the capacity of child care programs. We support the additional child care system improvements required by the federal government included in HB 96.

In addition to expanding child care assistance, we must also enact a refundable Child Tax Credit to help working families keep more of their hard-earned money. Voters understand that when families can afford the basics, they work more, earn more, and contribute more to Ohio’s economy. Ohioans overwhelmingly agree: families need relief, and the Child Tax Credit is a solution that works. A staggering 84% of Ohio voters support a Child Tax Credit, including 83% of Republicans, 78% of Independents, and 94% of Democrats. That support only grows—to 87%—when voters learned that both President Trump and the former president have backed expanding the Child Tax Credit. We don’t see bipartisan consensus like this often, especially in today’s political climate. This is a unique moment for Ohio to take action on a policy that truly unites voters and working families across the political spectrum.

A Child Tax Credit ensures that work pays for Ohio families. It incentivizes parents to stay in the workforce, reduces financial stress, and allows families to invest in their children’s futures. Studies have consistently shown that when families receive this kind of targeted tax relief, they spend it on essential goods and services—groceries, rent, child care—directly stimulating the local economy and supporting small businesses.

This is Ohio’s moment to act. By expanding publicly funded child care and the Child Care Choice Voucher program to serve families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty

Level and enacting a refundable Child Tax Credit, we can remove barriers that keep parents out of the workforce, strengthen our economy, and ensure Ohio remains a great place to live, work, and raise a family. These are policies that reward work, reduce dependency, and promote the growth of our youngest children and the economy. Supporting Ohio's youngest children is not just the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do for our state's future.

**Finally, we support other key programming proposed by the Department of Children and Youth in HB 96, which provides further critical support for young children and families including, but not limited to, the following:**

- **Investments to scale community impact models like Cradle Cincinnati to encourage collaboration between women, clinicians, hospitals, managed care and other community partners to reduce infant and maternal mortality.**
- **Increased access to evidence-based home visiting programs including scaling of the Family Connects model statewide.**
- **Increased state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers with developmental delays.**
- **Expanded access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives, including curricula grounded in the science of reading and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio.**

Investing in these initiatives ensures Ohio's babies have access to the care and resources they need to survive *and* thrive, strengthening our communities and our economy for generations to come.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions you may have.

*Attached to this testimony is a copy of the polling memo that is the source for all poll data used in this testimony. To view additional polling data, visit [www.groundworkohio.org/poll](http://www.groundworkohio.org/poll).*

*Also attached to this testimony is a summary of the impact of the proposed child tax credit proposed in House Bill 96 from the Prenatal-to-Three Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University and excerpts from the Columbus Dispatch dated March 2, 2025.*

*To learn more about the needs of young children and families, view Groundwork Ohio's [Early Childhood Data Dashboard 2025](#).*

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** NEIL NEWHOUSE/JARRETT LEWIS/TOMMY DOW  
PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES  
**CC:** LYNANNE GUTIERREZ, PRESIDENT & CEO, GROUNDWORK OHIO  
**SUBJECT:** OHIO STATEWIDE SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS  
**DATE:** JANUARY 23, 2025

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*On behalf of Groundwork Ohio, Public Opinion Strategies completed a statewide survey of 800 registered voters and an oversample of 484 parents with children ages five and younger in Ohio. The survey was conducted December 5-15, 2024, and has a credibility interval of  $\pm 3.95\%$  for the registered voter sample and  $\pm 5.08\%$  for the parent oversample.*

### KEY FINDINGS

**1. *The economic issues faced by Americans over the last several years have hit parents of young children especially hard.***

Approximately one-half of Ohioans (51%) and parents with children five and younger (44%) rate their own financial situation as only fair or poor. And, over a third of parents with children five and younger (34%) share they have been having serious problems paying their rent or mortgage. Nearly half of parents with children five and younger (47%) share they are having serious problems paying their credit card bills over the last few months.

**2. *For Ohio parents, child care is difficult to access and afford.***

Almost half of parents with children five and younger (49%) believe child care is difficult to find. Further, most parents with children five and younger (51%) believe the availability of high quality and affordable child care has gotten worse over the last few years. When it comes to the cost of child care, these parents (73%) overwhelmingly believe child care is expensive.

**3. *To most Ohioans – especially parents – the linkage between child care and the state's economy is undeniable.***

Overwhelming majorities of Ohio voters (86%) and parents with young children (90%) agree that increasing access to high-quality childcare will help strengthen the state's economy and workers. Similarly, majorities of voters (53%) and parents (79%) agree that the labor shortages permeating throughout the state are in part due to the lack of quality and affordable child care.

**4. *Problems with child care are having an economic impact.***

More than 4-in-10 working parents with children five and younger (44%) say they have had to miss work, leave early or lose focus because of challenges with child care. Further, more than one-third of working parents (41%) say they have lost more than five days of work in the past two years because of a lack of child care. And, among all Ohio working parents, nearly 5-in-10 (49%) have cut back on their work hours to care for their children. Putting this into real numbers using Census data, this means over 1,000,000 working parents in Ohio have cut back their work hours.

**5. *There is a clear connection between the state's economy and child care.***

When parents without child care are asked what would they be able to do if they had it, the dominant responses are “work more” and “get a job.” And, parents who have child care agree that child care allows them to “work more.” Further, more than 6-in-10 Ohio moms with children five and younger who do not currently work full time (61%) say they would go back to work if they had access to high quality and affordable child care. Clearly, parents believe that child care allows them to work more, provide for their families and be productive members of Ohio's economy.

**6. *With support extending cross party lines, Ohio voters are overwhelmingly in favor of increasing funding for child care “in order to increase access, affordability, and quality.”***

Nearly 9-in-10 Ohioans (84%) believe the state should increase funding for child care to increase access, affordability, and quality. Notably, this support includes 77% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 92% of Democrats.

**7. *The support for a Child Tax Credit is wide-ranging and deep.***

By an overwhelming margin, Ohio voters (84%) support creating a Child Tax Credit to provide tax relief to working families, with 83% of Republicans, 78% of Independents, and 94% of Democrats in favor of the relief efforts. The support of these voters edges even higher (87%) when they are informed that both Biden and Trump support expanding the Child Tax Credit.

***BOTTOM LINE***

The survey results paint a clear picture: Ohio's child care crisis is hitting families hard and voters across the political spectrum recognize both the problem and potential solutions. Parents of young children are facing significant financial strain, with many struggling to pay basic expenses while simultaneously dealing with the high costs and limited availability of quality child care. The overwhelming, bipartisan support for both increased child care funding and a Child Tax Credit suggests Ohioans understand this isn't just a family issue – it's an economic one. There is a clear mandate for state action on child care accessibility and affordability.

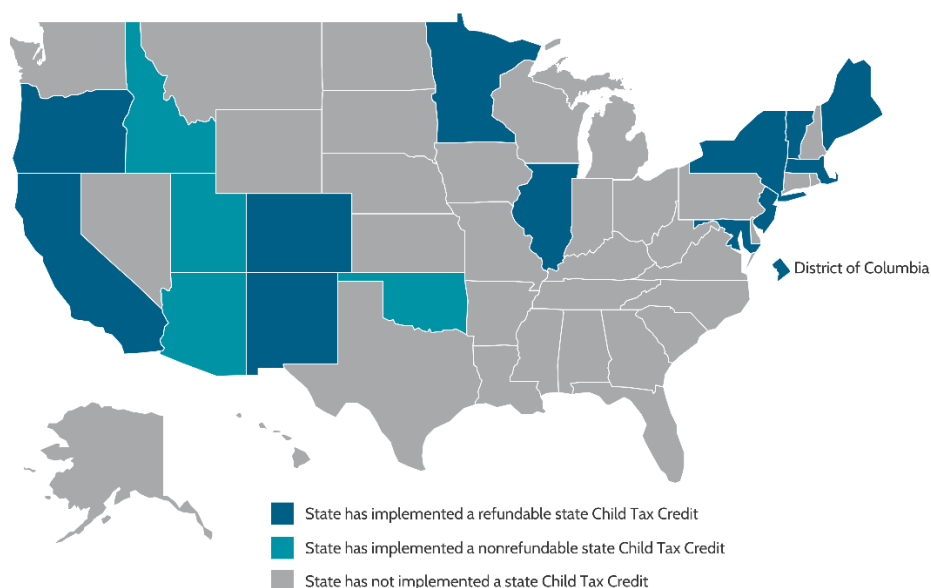
Looking ahead, state policymakers have an opportunity to address these challenges with strong public backing. The cross-party consensus on solutions, combined with voters' understanding of child care's role in economic growth, creates a favorable environment for policy change. Ohioans clearly understand and see the need for child care from an economic standpoint. They make the link between increasing access to child care and improving the state's economy – and they support policy changes to make that increased access a reality.



## Ohio Proposal for a State Child Tax Credit (CTC)

### Background on State CTCs

State CTCs are targeted tax credits designed to benefit children and their families. As of February 2025, 17 states offer a state CTC. More than half of states with a credit began implementing it in the past 5 years, and those that already had existing credits have expanded their generosity over that time frame.



Most state CTCs were implemented or expanded following the temporary expansion of the federal CTC in 2021, and because of their recency, state CTCs have not yet been studied rigorously. However, research has found numerous benefits for expanding the federal credit, suggesting that state credits are promising for improving outcomes for children and families. For example, temporary modifications to the federal CTC, through the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021, lifted an estimated 2.1 million children out of poverty. The expanded federal credit, which provided up to \$3,600 annually for each child ages birth to 5, reduced food insecurity and improved parents' mental health.



### ***State CTC Policy Variation***

State CTCs vary in refundability, structure, value, and eligibility. Thirteen states currently offer a refundable credit, and only four offer nonrefundable credits. The maximum value of credits has increased over the past several years as states have introduced more generous credits. As of tax year (TY) 2025, the maximum value of state CTCs ranges from \$100 per child in Arizona to \$1,750 in Minnesota.

Most states structure their state CTC as a per-child credit and either provide (1) the full credit to all eligible families (as Idaho and Massachusetts do) or (2) phase-down the value of the credit as families' incomes increase. Alternatively, three states (Illinois, New York, and Oklahoma) set the value of their state CTC as a percentage of another state or federal credit. Currently, the states with a per child credit do not have a phase in, so families in those states do not need to earn a minimum income to benefit from the credit.

In addition to Idaho and Massachusetts, New Mexico provides some credit to all families regardless of income. The remaining states have income limits to remain eligible for the credit. The income limits range from a maximum of \$15,000 per year in Maryland to \$440,000 per year for joint filers in Maine.

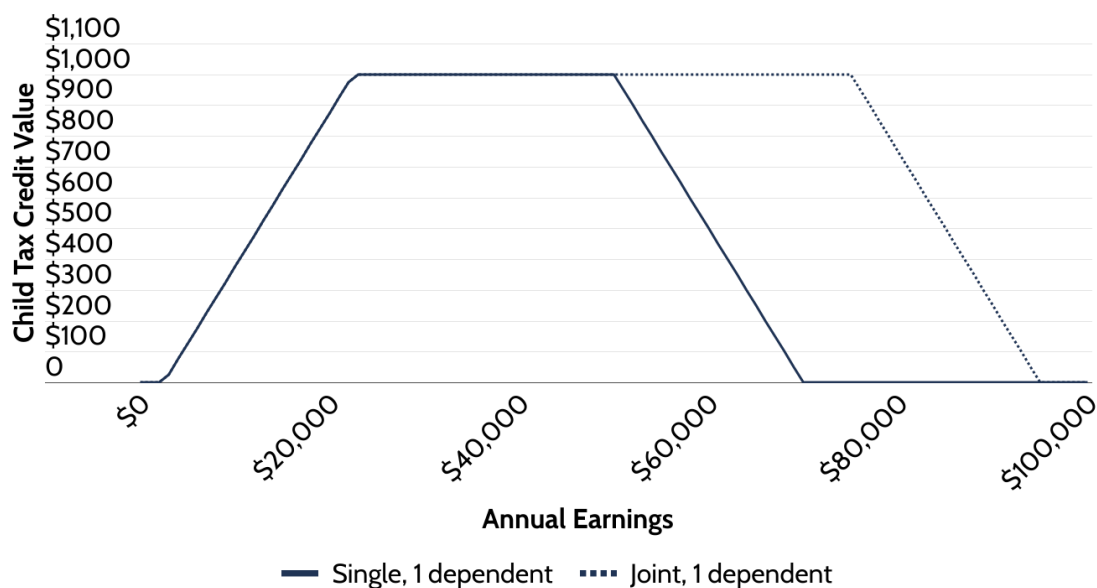
Six states (Arizona, Idaho, Maine, New Mexico, New York, and Oklahoma) align the age eligibility of their state credit with the federal CTC, making the credit available to families with children under age 17. Minnesota is the only state to be inclusive of 17- and 18-year-olds. The remaining states direct their credits towards younger children.

## Ohio's Proposal: House Bill 96

The child tax credit proposed in House Bill 96:

- Provides a maximum **refundable credit of \$1,000** to families with at least \$23,000 in income.
- Phases out beginning at \$50,000 for single filers and \$75,000 for joint filers. Single and joint filers with incomes exceeding \$70,000 and \$95,000 respectively, are ineligible for the benefit.

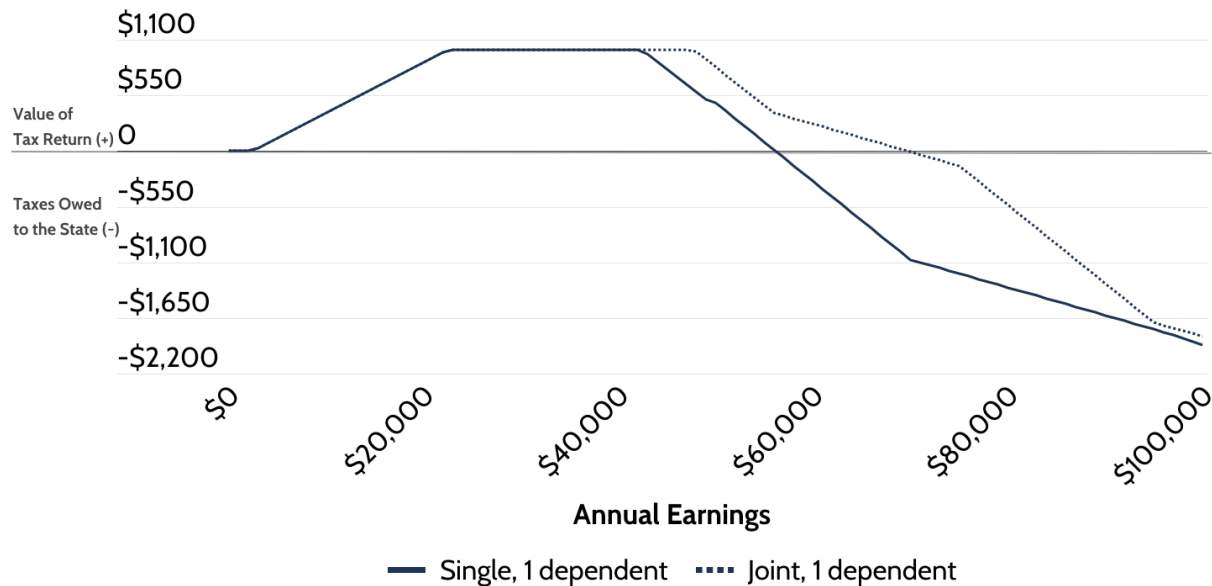
### Value of Ohio's Proposed Child Tax Credit



It is important to consider the proposed child tax credit within the context of Ohio's existing state income tax system, which includes a nonrefundable earned income tax credit (EITC) that is 30% of the federal credit. The nonrefundable EITC erases the tax liability for most recipients, **meaning that most who are EITC eligible would receive the entire value of the proposed CTC as a refund**. Importantly, for filers not eligible for the state EITC, the CTC decreases the amount of taxes owed to the state.

### Taxes Returned or Owed by Filing Status

Includes the value of the nonrefundable EITC and proposed CTC



# THE CONVERSATION



**DEWINE'S BUDGET**  
FAMILY AND CHILDREN

## The future of Ohio's children

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine's two-year budget includes a new child tax credit and other proposals he says will improve children's health, safety and education.

Today's Conversation features columns related to the plan.

What do you think about the governor's 2026-27 proposed budget? Let me know in a letter to the editor of 200 words or less emailed to [Letters@Dispatch.com](mailto:Letters@Dispatch.com). Include your full name, address and phone number with your submission.

GETTY IMAGES



**Your Turn**  
Tamara Lunan  
Guest columnist

## Lawmakers should help Dewine fix child care

All children deserve access to high-quality early education.

Those who render this invaluable care deserve wages that allow them to thrive. Whether a child care provider operates a home-based business or a child care center, all early childhood educators deserve wages that allow them to care for themselves and their families.

These core beliefs don't change depending on the child's zip code nor are they impacted by the type of child care setting.

Ohio lawmakers are faced with tough financial decisions but funding child care is not one of them.

Quality child care is a smart financial decision for our state because it helps businesses and our families thrive. Workers are unable to work, and businesses are unable to run, without adequate, affordable child care.

The truth is, Ohio faces serious challenges when it comes to equitable funding for early childhood education and care. Fortunately, Gov. Mike DeWine is committed to addressing these issues. And there are concrete things legislators can do to partner with the governor and early childhood educators.

### The eligibility rate for child care subsidies should be increased

The eligibility rate for child care is currently at 145% of the federal poverty level.

This means Ohio is dead last in our country in how we fund child care.

DeWine is working to raise it to 200% of the federal poverty level. When more families access care, more children are ready for kindergarten, and for a lifelong trajectory of academic success. It will also allow early childhood educators to offer competitive wages, which in turn will keep more child care educators in the child care field.

### Ohio needs an equitable funding formula for child care

The state's reimbursement for child care operators is based on attendance, not

See LUNAN, Page 19A



**Your Turn**  
Lynanne Gutierrez  
Guest columnist

## Lawmakers must support DeWine's budget plan

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine released his final two-year state budget, staying true to his commitment to support children and families. We agree with his summation: "It's a very, very good budget for our kids."

Now, lawmakers must enact these proposals with the necessary funding.

Among his key initiatives:

**State child tax credit:** A sliding-scale \$1,000 tax credit for working families with children from birth through age 6. Groundwork Ohio polling shows 84% of voters support this measure, with strong bipartisan backing. Over a third of Ohio parents with young children report serious struggles paying rent or mortgage. This tax credit is a critical step in reducing childhood poverty and supporting working families.

**Affordable child care:** Expanding access for working families earning up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Over 60% of Ohio mothers with young children who are not working full-time would return to work if they had access to quality, affordable child care. A working mom with two young children often spends \$10 per hour worked just to cover child care costs. This proposal not only helps families but also benefits businesses by increasing workforce participation.

**Early learning investments:** Increased support for the Ohio Governor's Imagination Library, providing free books monthly to children from birth to age 5. Reading is foundational to success, and this investment sparks early literacy. Additionally, the governor continues investing in evidence-based reading practices rooted in the Science of Reading, ensuring children develop strong literacy skills for lifelong learning.

**Maternal and infant health:** Expanding evidence-based home visiting programs from 10,000 to 35,000 families annually. Research shows these programs dramatically improve health outcomes, a critical need given Ohio's high infant mortality rate. Investing in home visiting ensures moms and babies receive essential prenatal and postnatal care, reducing health disparities.

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**Your Turn**  
Brad Wilcox and  
Michael Pugh  
Guest columnist

## Tax credit supports key two-parent households

The "American dream" is a "better, richer and happier life for all our citizens of every rank," wrote the historian James Truslow Adams over a century ago.

Yet with ordinary Americans succumbing to "deaths of despair" at alarming rates, rates of happiness hitting record lows and way too many men and women stuck in poverty across generations, it's probably no surprise that a growing share of Americans say the Dream is out of reach.

A 2024 Wall Street Journal poll found that only one in three U.S. adults believe the American dream still "holds true" compared to half of men and women in 2012.

This could not be more relevant for the state of Ohio. Ohio ranks third in deaths of despair — deaths related to suicide, drug overdoses or alcohol poisoning. A staggering one in six Ohio children are poor, according to the 2024 State of Poverty in Ohio, putting the state in the top third of states for child poverty.

And the state ranks in the bottom quintile for hope, according to the Brookings Institute.

These are long odds for too many Buckeyes who aspire to a "better, richer and happier life."

### Marriage, family stability, fertility hope and the future

A new report from the Center for Christian Virtue and the Institute for Family Studies argues that one essential element to reviving the American dream in Ohio is strengthening and stabilizing family life across the state.

The Hope and a Future report finds that Ohio ranks 29th when it comes to its Family Structure Index, which is based on state trends in marriage, family stability and fertility.

For instance, just 47.6% of Ohio children are raised in intact, married families for the duration of childhood, well below the national average of 53%. This below-average standing matters because strong, stable families are a powerful predictor of upward mobility.

Harvard economist Raj Chetty and his colleagues at Opportunity Insights have underscored the connection between upward

See TAX CREDIT, Page 19A



## OPINION

### Lunan

Continued from Page 17A

enrollment.

If a child is absent the child care operator has to eat the costs associated with that child not attending that day of care. This harms child care businesses. Again, the governor is aligned with this approach and we're hopeful legislators will partner with him.

#### Child care educators should receive child care for their own children

Child care educators ensure children have the academic foundation and the social emotional supports that will position them for long-term success. They often care for other people's children, without the confidence of knowing how they will provide financially for their own children.

Child care educators should receive complimentary care for their own children as well as competitive wages and benefits. Without adequate investments, many will leave the field, taking their passion and expertise with them. Other states, such as Kentucky, have offered free child care to their child care workers which boosted their child care industry with the worker infusion it needed.

#### Fix our regressive system of taxation

Our state relies on a regressive system of taxation. This places undue burdens on people who can least afford it. If everyone paid their fair share, our state would have sufficient funding for priorities such as child care.

When child care is underfunded, there are child care deserts, limited child care spots, and turnover in the industry. If we had a funding system that was similar to how K-12 is funded, there would be guaranteed revenue for child care.

Our entire community — children, families, employers and early childhood educators — benefit from adequate investments in child care.

When the care economy fails, entire neighborhoods and businesses suffer. To be clear, the care economy is the collection of workers who provide care: early childhood educators, home health care aides and others.

As it presently stands, care economy educators are underpaid and worse, undervalued. When care economy educators are underpaid and undervalued, so too are our children and our communities.

The bottom line is we are all impacted when the care economy is in crisis. Fortunately, our elected leaders have an opportunity through our state budget to resolve it.

*Tamara Lunan is the director of The CEO Project, a division of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative.*

### Gutierrez

Continued from Page 17A

All of us want Ohio to be the best place to be a young child, but that requires making thoughtful, research-driven investments. Gov. DeWine has issued a challenge: Are we committed to our children's future? Are we committed to Ohio's future?

We say yes! Now is the time to act. These proposals must receive full legislative support

### Tax credit

Continued from Page 17A

mobility — the classic rags-to-riches trajectory from childhood into adulthood — and family structure.

His 2014 study found that the strongest community-level predictor of mobility for poor kids was the share of two-parent families in a community. In other words, poor children have a markedly higher chance of achieving the American dream if they grow up in places with a higher share of two-parent families.

Chetty's work could not be more relevant for the Buckeye State.

The share of children living in a single-parent home varies a great deal across the state. It ranges from 5% in Holmes County and 8% in Geauga County to 34% in Lucas County and 38% in Cuyahoga County.

#### How two-parents households connect to the American dream

After analyzing Chetty's Opportunity Insights data, we found that these regional trends are tied to the average adult household income of children raised in poor households (whose parental income was below the 25th percentile) across Ohio.

For poor children born in 1992, as the share of two-parent households within a county increased, their average household income as adults also rose. Specifically, poor children who grew up in Ohio counties with lots of single-parent families only reached about the 40th percentile in household income as young adults. However, poor children who grew up in communities where 85% or more of the households were headed by two-parent families typically reached above the 50th percentile as young adults.

For example, poor children raised in Holmes or Putnam County, marked by high numbers of two-parent families, reached close to the 60th percentile as 27-year-olds, compared to poor children raised in Cuyahoga or Hamilton County, which have more single-parent families, who reached just under the 40th percentile at the same age.

to ensure children and families receive the resources they need to thrive.

We urge Ohioans to stand with the governor and Groundwork Ohio in advocating for these vital initiatives. Lawmakers need to hear from voters that supporting children and families is a priority. Visit [GroundworkOhio.org](http://GroundworkOhio.org) to get involved and make your voice heard.

*Lynanne Gutierrez is president and CEO of Groundwork Ohio, a nonpartisan public-policy research and advocacy organization focused on early learning and child development.*

In other words, children born poor in Holmes or Putnam County had above-average household incomes as adults. These figures suggest the American dream is much more alive in communities across Ohio where strong and stable families are the clear norm.

So, Chetty's data is clear. Two-parent households are essential for upward mobility in Ohio.

The problem, though, is that too many communities across the state do not have enough of the kind of strong and stable families that foster this kind of economic mobility — not to mention minimizing deaths of despair and maximizing happiness for ordinary men and women.

That's because the Buckeye State is below the national average when it comes to family stability.

#### Why DeWine's proposed child tax credit matters

The challenge, then, facing Ohio leaders is to take steps to strengthen marriage and family life across the state.

Policymakers should ask public schools to teach the Success Sequence (which underlines the importance of education, work and marriage), get behind Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed child tax credit designed to help ease the financial challenges facing working- and middle-class families and ensure that state policies do not penalize marriage.

And religious, educational and civic leaders should do more to foster the values and virtues that make for stable and happy marriages and families across the state. In other words, if they are intent on reviving the form of the American dream in Ohio, public and private leaders must work together to elevate the faltering fortunes of the family in the Buckeye State.

*Brad Wilcox is a distinguished university professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and lead author of a new Center for Christian Virtue report, Hope and a Future. Center for Christian Virtue is based in Ohio.*

*Michael Pugh is a research associate at the American Enterprise Institute.*

polymers (rubber, plastics) in Akron, glass in Toledo, steel in Cleveland, Canton and Youngstown/Warren. Support the growth of these basic industries and encourage downstream value-added manufacturing in the same regions (autos, aerospace, tires). Recruit tech, logistics and finance companies that serve them.

5. Finally, forgive as much municipal debt as possible. Legacy debt has hindered Ohio's older industrial cities for decades, as obligations that were made in the 1940s-1970s boom years became financial burdens after the abrupt industrial crash. Removing said burdens will free up resources for economic development and infrastructure.

*Nick Horning, Akron*

#### Lowering taxes is possible. Here's how.

Property tax is an unfair burden on seniors who no longer have children in the educational system as well as most owners of inherited farms.

Some food for thought with regard to lowering property taxes might be to first look at the elimination of unnecessary spending at the state level, lowering or replacing property taxes by replacing them with a consumption tax and/or raising state sales tax.

Any change in taxes that would eliminate the responsibility on a certain sector and spread the responsibility to all rather than just property owners. Another thought might be to raise the lodging tax.

*Danny Minton, McArthur*

### Derrow

Continued from Page 18A

and billionaires" in the country wouldn't bail us out. Confiscating every dollar of the income from the top 1% of taxpayers would still leave the average household with \$313,000 on its American Excess credit card.

The only solution is to cut up that card.

#### DOGE is spinning heads

Enter Trump's promised "Department of Government Efficiency," headed by Elon Musk. DOGE for short.

Musk's youthful team of computer sleuths have been deployed at the precise time AI has created financial review tools that far exceed the ability of even a stadium full of accountants and auditors.

The capability for AI to review unfathomably huge amounts of data for errors, inconsistencies and irregularities is stunning to behold. The items flagged can then be reviewed by humans versed in accountability.

This technology can also help Ohio. Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed budget may leave many school districts, including some in central Ohio, short millions of dollars.

A DOGE endeavor in how Ohio funds its schools could find enough mispending to cover this shortfall. And, as someone who spent eight years as an elected school board member who grappled with budget issues, I say let's give it a try.

No wonder Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost is suggesting a DOGE-like project for our state.

Of course, not everyone embraces this trend.

Bureaucrats who've long thrived on inefficiency are already crying foul. Career politicians, whose reelection strategies depend on endless government expansion, are sputtering and even cursing.

And the same pols who claim Trump is creating a constitutional crisis for exercising executive authority reject their own accountability for ceding those powers to the executive for decades.

But here's the reality: AI-driven financial oversight isn't partisan. Waste is waste. Accountability is accountability. If the technology exists to ferret out fraud, incompetence and inefficiency, why wouldn't we welcome it?

For all the noise about the first month of Trump, one thing is clear: he made promises and is keeping them. That might be a new phenomenon in politics, but it shouldn't be.

Accountability is in, inefficiency is out — and it appears democracy can handle a little spring cleaning.

*New Albany resident Philip Derrow is a retired business owner. He was a two-term member of the New Albany-Plain Local Board of Education. He is a frequent Columbus Dispatch contributor. Reach him at [philderrowdispatch@gmail.com](mailto:philderrowdispatch@gmail.com).*

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#### Next governor must commit to programs that are working

Re: "Central Ohio booms while the rest of the state withers. Tell us what we can do," Feb. 24: Thank you, Columbus Dispatch, for continuing to remind us that there are two states in Ohio: one that is growing and one that is not.

We, at the Greater Ohio Policy Center, have previously written about the importance of comprehensive planning in creating roadmaps to the future for local communities. We've also talked about the need to support existing residents in reaching their full potential. These remain proven pathways to prosperity.

We also think policymakers and state agencies should always consider how one-time capital investments create long-term operating obligations for local residents. Limiting "greenfield" investments and prioritizing new factories and facilities to developed areas in slow-growth areas will ensure communities can use local taxes and fees to proactively invest in projects and residents, instead of maintaining aging infrastructure.

There are a number of existing state programs that are helping Ohio communities stabilize and thrive.

The next governor simply needs to commit to retaining and expanding programs with demonstrable outcomes, such as: the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit, brownfields cleanup pro-

gramming, and the Ohio Housing Trust Fund.

Assured continuation of these programs will attract needed private investment to communities across the state.

*Alison Goebel, Executive Director Greater Ohio Policy Center, Columbus*

#### A real plan for Ohio

Akron native here, now living back in my hometown after nine years in Columbus and six years in New York City. Ohio, for statewide prosperity, needs to focus on these points:

1. Make it easier, quicker and cheaper to redevelop brownfields. One of the biggest drags on growth in Ohio's older industrial cities is the sheer cost associated with redeveloping former industrial sites. By streamlining this process, we will see a massive number of new projects in currently impoverished neighborhoods.

2. Continue strengthening workforce training and career education, especially in the manufacturing and tech fields. Partner with institutions like the University of Akron and Cleveland State University, as well as smaller institutions like Lorain County Community College and Stark State.

3. Keep and strengthen Ohio's conservative majority. For a Midwestern state with cold winters and without coastline, having a business-friendly governance is absolutely essential. The Democrats, as currently constituted, fail on that front.

4. Continue, and increase, support for industry clusters across the state:

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of this state."

Some pro-voucher hairsplitters try to argue that "common schools" aren't the same as "public schools." If so, that would sluice Ohio taxpayers' money away from public schools, which are subject to elected, taxpayer-accountable school boards, toward private, very private, schools.

That "common" vs. "public" argument was refuted long ago by Ohio's then-attorney general, future governor and U.S. Sen., John W. Bricker, an ultra-conservative Columbus Republican. In a 1933 opinion, Bricker ruled "state school funds could be used only for the establishment or maintenance of common or public schools." Such schools, Bricker added, "were those popularly referred to as synonymous with the term common schools as used in the state constitution."

House Speaker Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, ardently supports tuition vouchers, as does Republican Gov. Mike DeWine.

That suggests that the mis-spending (to use a polite word) of taxpayers' money that should go to public schools will continue unless some judges step up. But given the Ohio Supreme Court's deference (to use another polite word) to their fellow Republicans in the General Assembly, that's a reach.