

Joan Spoerl
The Literacy Cooperative
March 10, 2025
Ohio House Finance Committee

Chairperson Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Joan Spoerl, and I am a former kindergarten, Head Start and preschool teacher, now working for The Literacy Cooperative as Director of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (in Cuyahoga County), a member of the Ohio Prenatal to Three Coalition Steering Committee and a board member of the Black Child Development Institute of Ohio. I reside in Cleveland Heights.

I am submitting written testimony today to urge you to prioritize critical investments in early childhood programs in Ohio's FY2026-27 state budget, House Bill 96.

As someone with decades of experience working with families with young children, I know how important it is to support young children and working families. In addition, my undergraduate degree in Public Policy led me to pursue a career in early childhood education because my studies suggested that for our society to thrive, we need to get things right for children in the critical early years of brain development.

As University of Chicago Nobel economist James Heckman and other economists have demonstrated, for every dollar invested in quality early childhood programs, there is a \$7-13 return on investment. There's both a moral and economic argument to be made for such investments.

Groundwork Ohio has outlined key priorities that will strengthen our state's early childhood system, including

1. Make work pay for working families with young children.

- o Increase access to affordable, quality child care for working families to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

- o Implement a refundable child tax credit for working parents with young children.

2. Improve health outcomes for moms and babies.

- o Increase access to evidence-based home visiting programs including expanding the Family Connects model statewide.

- o Invest and 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.

3. Support quality early learning experiences that prepare children for Kindergarten.

- o Invest in effective early childhood educators to meet the growing needs of young children by improving payment practices to child care programs.

o Strengthen Early Development and Literacy Support: Increase state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, while also expanding access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives, including curricula grounded in the science of reading and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio.

These policies will not only help children thrive but also boost Ohio's workforce and economy. I urge you to fully fund these initiatives to ensure every child gets the best start in life.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families.

Sincerely,

Joan Spoerl, MAT