

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the issue of childcare. My name is Lauren, and I am a member of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality.

Under the Governor's proposed budget, he would increase universal child care access to those up to 160% of the Federal Poverty Line and would allow for those up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line to receive subsidized child care. While I am so glad to see an increase in those who have access to free and subsidized child care, I am here to say that this is not enough. Families in Ohio will suffer without access to affordable childcare.

I was raised by a single mother of 2 so I know the strain of being able to support a family while being low income. But it is worse today than it was when I was growing up.

I want to walk through the costs of living for a family of 3 like mine who are living 225% above the federal poverty line which is 59,962.50 per year or 4,996.88 a month. This family would not qualify for subsidized child care under the Governor's proposed budget.

The average cost of a 2 bedroom apartment in Cleveland, where I live, is \$1600 a month. The average cost of groceries for adults is \$350 a month and \$250 a month for kids. So that would be \$850 a month on groceries for a mother and 2 kids. The average monthly utilities bill in Ohio is \$472, which includes water, energy, gas, phone, and internet. The average American spends \$171 on gas per month. All that alone adds up to \$3,093.

According to the Tootris Institute, the average monthly cost of center-based child care in the state of Ohio as of January 2025 is \$1029 for infant care and \$798 for 4-year-old care per child. So let's say my family of 3 has one infant and one four year old. This family's child care cost would equal \$1827, added onto their monthly costs of \$3093 would mean this family is spending \$4920 a month on living expenses. That leaves \$76 left per month for everything else. For when their kid needs new clothes, when they need to get an oil change, when an emergency arises or when they want to have a nice treat, they have \$76 to do so. The list of expenses I listed is not comprehensive as anyone who has lived knows. There are so many expenses that arise everyday especially with kids that \$76 per month could not cover. And then on top of that, this makes it impossible for families to save any money in the event of emergencies, or for things like a college fund for their kids.

Even under the Governor's proposed budget, the amount of subsidy received by those who are at 200% of the Federal Poverty Line is greatly decreased. These families cannot afford to pay for their childcare, and doing so takes away from the future of these kids.

We want Ohio families to grow and thrive, and most importantly to stay in Ohio. To raise their kids here, and hopefully send them to an Ohio school where then they will settle down and make a family here in the state. But that can't happen if families cannot afford childcare. I implore you to increase those who receive free childcare to 200% of the federal poverty line and those who receive subsidized child care to 300%.

Thank you so much for your time. If you have any questions I'm happy to answer them