



**Interested Party Testimony- Finance Committee
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget
March 13th, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Finance Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 96 in support of The Childhood League Center's funding request which would appropriate \$250,000 in each fiscal year through the Ohio Department of Children and Youth Part C Early Intervention line to provide intensive early intervention and educational services, providing services and support resources for providers and families serving children with developmental delays, and to support the Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters (PLAY) Project for young children with autism.

My name is Jennifer Haddow, and I am the Chief Program Officer at The Childhood League Center.

The Childhood League Center (The Center) was founded in 1945 by a group of visionary women in Columbus to help children in need. The Center serves children birth through five years old who have developmental delays or are at risk of falling behind in the classroom and in life. The Center does this through family-centered, individualized services for children. The Center provides comprehensive services and works side-by-side with families to help each child develop to their full potential.

Children constantly grow and learn, even beyond school hours. In view of an entire lifetime, the window of birth through age five may seem small, but that time is critical, especially for a child with a developmental delay. Nearly 90% of brain development happens in the first five years of life. The earlier interventions happen, the greater the impact on that child's life. The Center's early intervention specialists work directly with a family in their home to confidently promote their child's development. Each family along with the child's team come together to develop outcomes that address the family's concerns and priorities. The impact of these interventions lasts a lifetime.

The services provided by The Center are critical to the advancement of children with developmental delays and those who are at risk for developmental delays. With early intervention and high-quality early childhood education, children are less likely to be held back a grade, be reliant on public assistance, or engage in criminal behavior. Conversely, those children are more likely to be kindergarten-ready, graduate high school, and have higher earnings and better health outcomes. Research shows that high-quality, birth-to-five early childhood education provides a higher rate of return than preschool alone – a 13% return on investment. In fact, recent guidelines suggest starting an integrated developmental and behavioral intervention as soon as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is diagnosed or seriously suspected. With early intervention, some children with autism make so much progress their symptoms are no longer evident.

The Childhood League Center is a Center of Excellence for the PLAY (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) Project, a parent-implemented autism intervention for young children that is



intensive and evidence-based. It is based on relationships and can improve social interaction, communication, and functional development. The PLAY Project empowers families to build their own skills to support their child's development, increasing the bond and affect between the child and parent in the process.

In Ohio, The PLAY Project has been officially adopted by Ohio's early intervention system. As a result, all children in Columbus, ages 18 months to 3 years old who have been diagnosed with ASD or have 'red flags' for ASD are eligible to receive PLAY Project services for free. The PLAY Project is an effective parent training program that can be broadly and quickly disseminated to serve the growing number of young children with ASD. The Childhood League Center is committed to identifying underserved counties in Ohio that benefit from PLAY and bringing this intervention to those counties. The goal is to have PLAY in all 88 counties, and funding from the state is critical to this effort.

The PLAY Project began as a nationally, and now internationally, recognized model of early intervention for autism. PLAY Project Consultants made monthly home visits, coached parents on how to engage using PLAY Project principles, methods, techniques, and activities, and provided monthly video and written feedback. The key findings from this study found that when parents successfully engage their child, the child makes progress in their social interaction and development. The study found that children who participated in PLAY Project markedly improved their ability to interact, be social, and substantially reduced their autism symptom severity.

I respectfully ask you to support our amendment of \$250,000 in each fiscal year in the Ohio Department of Children and Youth Part C Early Intervention line to support the Childhood League Center and our work.

Thank you.

Jennifer Haddow