

Rev. Lesley E. Jones
Amos Project
April 2, 2025
Testimony on House Bill 96

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 96. My name is Lesley Jones, I am a United Church of Christ licensed minister, serving a congregation in Cincinnati and I represent the Amos Project, a coalition of clergy and congregations from across the state working to build a beloved community where everyone is free, safe and healthy. I am here to ask that you support Ohio kids, families, and childcare providers by including the childcare improvements outlined in Governor DeWine's executive budget, by 1] raising eligibility for childcare assistance for parents, and 2] funding federally required changes to copay caps and reimbursing based on enrollment.

As a pastor of a church that serves more than 50 families with children under 12 years old in Hamilton County—I have first hand knowledge of both the necessity and benefit parents experience when they receive assistance to cover childcare costs. Sharnae and Lee both work long-hours in the food service industry. They have a toddler who attends a local childcare, recently Sharnae was presented with an opportunity to become a manager, there would be a slight increase in her pay, that would result in their household income being slightly above the eligibility for assistance. Rather than accept the promotion Sharnae declined because the increase in her pay would not be enough to cover the increase in child care expenses. While the opportunity to advance in her career was something Sharnae desired, she and Lee were not making enough to lose the assistance. This is not an isolated story among families we serve. William, a single dad of three has a similar story. He was over the eligibility but did not make enough to cover childcare, rent, and food. Making enough to lose assistance but not enough to maintain adequate care for their children is a very real issue. One that raising the eligibility for childcare assistance can solve immediately, giving hard working parents peace of mind that their children are able to receive adequate care and that they can build meaningful careers overtime.

Another issue that I have learned from the families we serve face is long waiting lists

for child care at local centers. Among the reasons for the long wait lists are understaffed centers. These centers either can't find workers because salaries are low or they can't afford to hire more staff. The overhead with rising food costs, rents, and insurance is too high and the reimbursement rate and process is not sufficient to cover the business costs. Most childcare center owners are not in the business to get rich, they care about our children and believe the children deserve loving, caring professionals to serve them and their families. That is why I encourage to fund the federally required changes to copay caps and reimburse on enrollment.

You have an opportunity to do something for the least among us, Ohio kids. Do not get weary in doing what is good and right. The children that benefit from your decision today will grow up to be tomorrow's leaders.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.