

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani and Members of the Committee, my name is Caitlin O'Neal. My husband Joey and I have two daughters — Rylee, our typically developing 5-year-old, and Reece, our 3-year-old with a rare genetic condition called Diploid Triploid Mosaicism, one of only about 40 known cases in the world.

Reece's condition was diagnosed before birth, and she spent the first 2.5 months of her life in the NICU. She faced numerous challenges including breathing difficulties, feeding issues requiring a g-tube, developmental delays, hearing loss, and recently, epilepsy. As young, healthy parents who did everything "right," we were devastated and overwhelmed.

After NICU discharge, we struggled to find proper care. We were on an island, relying on Reece's former NICU nurses just to make it through the days. We tried every childcare option imaginable without success — until we found Easterseals Redwood in Fort Mitchell, KY.

Though there were no immediate openings, I called weekly until we finally got the life-changing news: Reece had a spot. That moment changed everything. Easterseals Redwood provided more than care — they gave us peace, expertise, and hope. Their team welcomed us with understanding and confidence, treating Reece's g-tube and seizures not as barriers, but as everyday parts of the care they expertly provide.

However, the challenges of having our only viable care option in another state are real. We live in Ohio and Reece's many medical appointments are scattered across different hospital locations. Emergencies, travel, and costs add stress to our already difficult journey — especially as we are not financially eligible to receive Medicaid or any other state assistance. Thus far, by making many sacrifices to overcome this challenge, we've been successful at continuing Reece's care at Easterseals Redwood, but the financial expectation is likely not going to be sustainable.

As a school psychologist in Ohio where I work daily with families who have children with varying disabilities, I now personally understand the struggles that these families face in terms of childcare, nursing care, and financial burdens. We are ever so lucky to have Easterseals Redwood — but hundreds of families around us are still searching for support.

Please consider how important it is to bring a center like Easterseals Redwood to Ohio. It's not just a daycare — it's a lifeline.