



Katie Kelly, PRE4CLE  
Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
May 27, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Katie Kelly, and I serve as the Executive Director of PRE4CLE—a citywide initiative committed to ensuring that every child in Cleveland has access to high-quality preschool.

Over the past decade, PRE4CLE has brought together community partners around a shared goal: to expand access to high-quality preschool and increase kindergarten readiness. When we began this work, only 25% of Cleveland’s children were enrolled in high-quality preschool programs. As a result, just 16% of students entered kindergarten fully prepared, according to Ohio’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

Today, thanks to strong collaboration across the community and partnership with the state, we’re proud to report that 50% of Cleveland’s preschool-aged children are now enrolled in high-quality preschool. **Among those who attend a PRE4CLE program, we see kindergarten readiness rates that are 20 percentage points higher than their peers without access to quality early learning.** These gains carry forward: state evaluations show that these children are significantly more likely to meet third grade reading proficiency and succeed throughout their academic careers.

We know that high-quality early education happens in many settings—public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes. We support and promote all of these options in Cleveland, and we strongly support the Governor’s proposed budget as an important step toward expanding access to safe, effective early learning opportunities for more working families.

**To that end, we urge the Senate to restore the proposed child care eligibility expansion for families earning up to 160% of the federal poverty level. We also call on the Senate to reinstate the \$25 million in FY27 in Child Care Choice Voucher funding removed in the House.** This funding is essential for families earning between 160% and 200% of the federal poverty level—families who still face significant challenges affording high-quality care for their children.



These investments respond to a critical need. In Cuyahoga County, a 2023 survey found that 78% of parents identified access to child care as a barrier to employment. More than 10,000 parents reported being unable to work due to child care challenges, and over 12,000 said they were limited to part-time work. These numbers reflect the difficult decisions many families are forced to make—and they underscore the urgent need to strengthen our child care system.

**Finally, we are concerned by the House provision making the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) optional for districts. We respectfully ask the Senate to remove this language.** The KRA is a vital tool for teachers to tailor instruction, and it serves as an essential measure of the impact of our state’s early learning investments. In Cleveland, we rely on KRA data to guide our work, assess progress, and improve preschool quality. Recent updates to the assessment have made it shorter and easier to administer, reducing the burden on schools while preserving its value to educators, communities, and policymakers alike.

Finally, I would add that all of the amendments for the requests contained in my testimony are attached, as well as an overview of the report referenced regarding the impact of child care access on working families in Cuyahoga County.

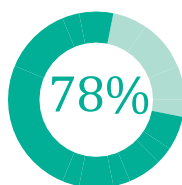
Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to Ohio’s youngest learners and their families.

# Our Child Care System Isn't Working

## The child care system isn't working for Northeast Ohio families.

Parents with young children want affordable, high-quality, and accessible child care, but it's not available to most families, leaving them to rely on a patchwork of multiple arrangements for child care.

**55% of parents say child care is not affordable and middle-income families are more likely than low income parents to say that finding affordable care is a challenge.**



**of parents say child care access is a challenge including 92% of IT Workers and 81% of Health Care Workers**

## The child care system isn't working for Northeast Ohio employers.

When child care doesn't work for parents, employers bear the brunt of the consequences.

**Inadequate child care raises Cleveland's unemployment rate by 50%**



**of parents say that inadequate child care has impaired their career options**

**~20,000 parents are on the sidelines of the labor market**



**More than 7 in 10 parents say that child care problems have caused them to be distracted, late, or to have missed commitments at work.**

**Child care causes workplace disruptions in Healthcare, IT, and Manufacturing.** Workers in these leading sectors report that child care impacts their productivity and hours worked and worry they may be fired.

**The child care system isn't working for Northeast Ohio's economy.** When child care doesn't work for parents or employers, everyone pays the price.



**Parents annually miss out on \$411 Million**

from fewer hours worked, lower wages, time spent searching for a job that fits a parent's existing child care arrangements, and diminished future earnings due to less training and less experience.



**Businesses annually miss out on \$121 Million**

from a workforce with lower productivity and shorter tenure. In addition to this loss, over time businesses also must pay for recruitment and hiring as their workforce changes; and there are added operational and managerial costs. Over time, the workforce is not optimally trained and has less experience.



**The community annually loses \$114 Million**

in tax revenue from lower economic output impacting tax revenues at the local, state, and federal levels.

NOTE: Results from a 2023 survey of a representative sample of parents in Cuyahoga County with children under the age of five. For the full technical report visit [earlymattersneo.org](https://earlymattersneo.org).

# Be part of the solution

**Now is the time to transform our child care system to support and grow our workforce.**

These challenges are solvable, but we need you. Help make Northeast Ohio the best place in the state and the country to be a child, a parent, a child care professional, and an employer.

## Join the movement

### 1 Understand the needs of working parents:

Your greatest resource is at your fingertips! Parents working in your organization are dealing with child care challenges right now. Make sure you understand how these challenges are impacting your organization and your bottom line.

- **Talk to your HR department** about what data are already available to you.
- **Conduct a survey or host focus groups** to hear about child care challenges directly from the working parents in your organization.

**Early Matters NEO is a group of partners focused on changing policies to ensure working families have access to affordable, quality child care to support workforce and business growth in Northeast Ohio.**

**To learn more and get involved, visit [www.earlymattersneo.org](http://www.earlymattersneo.org).**

**Get in touch: [info@earlymattersneo.org](mailto:info@earlymattersneo.org).**

### 2 Partner with child care experts:

The child care system is complex, but there are local experts who can help you think about and understand it more deeply.

- **The partners who came together to work on this report are a great place to start.** They represent decades of leadership on child care, education, policy, workforce, and economic development and are ready to talk to employers like you to identify solutions.
- **Ask questions and stay engaged.** Talk to the local experts and advocates, your employees, policymakers, state and local agencies, and even child care providers to learn about the landscape.
- **Think Big.** Child care is a big challenge that needs big solutions. Help disrupt, transform, and strengthen the child care system.

### 3 Become a champion:

Join our coalition to fix Northeast Ohio's child care system and propel our region forward!

- **Support advocacy** at the local, state, and federal levels. Add funding for high-quality child care to your organization's advocacy agenda.
- **Spread the word by sharing** this report with other employers and leaders you know.
- **Ask your local Chamber of Commerce** how they are engaging in child care policy and how membership can be more involved.



**Join the movement! Sign on to our coalition to receive information, updates, and action alerts.**

Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96  
As Passed by the House  
KIDCD50

\_\_\_\_\_ moved to amend as follows:

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| In line 351 of the title, delete "5104.52,"   | 1  |
| In line 45006, reinsert "Results of diagnostic assessments"                             | 2  |
| In line 45007, after " <del>under</del> " insert " <u>described in division (A) (1)</u> | 3  |
| <u>of</u> " and reinsert "section 3301.0715 of the"                                     | 4  |
| In line 45008, reinsert "Revised Code"  | 5  |
| In line 45014, after the stricken period insert " <u>i</u> :"                           | 6  |
| In line 45015, reinsert "(o) "  | 7  |
| In line 45018, reinsert "(p) " and delete " <u>(o)</u> "                                | 8  |
| In line 45021, reinsert "(q) " and delete " <u>(p)</u> "                                | 9  |
| In line 45025, reinsert "(r) " and delete " <u>(q)</u> "                                | 10 |
| In line 45489, after "(2) " reinsert the balance of the line                            | 11 |
| Reinsert lines 45490 and 45491  | 12 |
| In line 45492, after the second " <del>the</del> " insert " <u>The</u> "                | 13 |
| Reinsert line 45493   | 14 |
| In line 45494, after " <del>youth</del> " insert " <u>to each kindergarten student</u>  | 15 |

not earlier than the first day of July of the school year in which the 16  
student is enrolled in kindergarten and not later than the twentieth day 17  
of instruction of that school year"; reinsert ". In no case" 18

Reinsert lines 45495 and 45496 19

In line 45497, reinsert "(3)" 20

In line 45527, after "education" insert "and workforce"; reinsert 21  
"or the department of children and youth"; delete "and" 22

In line 45528, delete "workforce" 23

In line 45536, reinsert "each"; delete "the"; reinsert "the"; delete 24  
"all" 25

In line 45539, reinsert "as follows:" 26

Reinsert lines 45540 through 45542 27

In line 45543, reinsert "department of education" and insert "and 28  
workforce" 29

In line 45544, after "education" insert "and workforce"; reinsert 30  
"and the department of children" 31

In line 45545, reinsert "and youth"; delete "and workforce" 32

In line 45546, reinsert "Either"; delete "The"; reinsert "report 33  
school and" 34

In line 45547, reinsert "district level kindergarten diagnostic 35  
assessment data and" 36

In line 45556, after "(F)" reinsert the balance of the line 37

Reinsert lines 45557 through 45568 38

In line 45569, reinsert "education" and insert "and workforce"; 39  
reinsert "and the department of children and youth and, that for" 40

Reinsert lines 45570 through 45582 41

In line 45583, reinsert "(G)" 42

In line 46597, reinsert ", including the" 43

In line 46598, reinsert "kindergarten readiness assessment," 44

In line 128844, delete "5104.52," 45

In the table on line 139001, in row L, delete "\$3,292,091 46

\$3,390,959" and insert "\$6,052,091 \$6,150,959" 47

In the table on line 139001, in rows AA and BA, add \$2,760,000 to 48

each fiscal year 49

After line 139092, insert: 50

**"Section 423.80. EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION LEARNING 51**

**STANDARDS 52**

The foregoing appropriation item 830409, Early Care and 53

Education Learning Standards, shall be used to support the 54

state's early learning assessment work, the assessments required 55

under section 3301.0715 of the Revised Code, and the 56

implementation of curricula, assessments, and learning 57

activities that are aligned with the science of reading and the 58

early learning and development standards." 59

The motion was \_\_\_\_\_ agreed to.

#### SYNOPSIS

#### **Kindergarten readiness assessment**

<b>R.C. 3301.0714, 3301.0715, 3302.03, and 5104.52</b>	62
Restores the kindergarten readiness assessment removed by	63
the House, including its use on the state report card and	64
related data collection and reporting requirements.	65
<b>Department of Children and Youth</b>	66
<b>Sections 423.10 and 423.80</b>	67
Increases GRF ALI 830409, Early Care and Education	68
Learning Standards, by \$2,760,000 in each fiscal year (thereby	69
restoring the Executive appropriation amounts).	70
Restores Executive language requiring ALI 830409, Early	71
Care and Education Learning Standards, to be used to support the	72
state's early learning assessment work, the kindergarten	73
readiness assessment, and the implementation of curricula,	74
assessments, and learning activities that are aligned with the	75
science of reading and the early learning and development	76
standards.	77



Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96  
As Passed by the House

\_\_\_\_\_moved to amend as follows:

In the table on line 139001, in row AY, delete the second 1  
"\$327,850,000" and insert "\$352,850,000" 2

In the table on line 139001, in rows AZ and BA, add \$25,000,000 to 3  
fiscal year 2027 4

In line 139317, delete "each"; after "year" insert "2026 and 5  
\$75,000,000 in fiscal year 2027" 6

The motion was \_\_\_\_\_agreed to.

SYNOPSIS 7

**Department of Children and Youth** 8

**Sections 423.10 and 423.190** 9

Increases FED Fund 3V62 ALI 830605, TANF Block Grant, by 10  
\$25,000,000 in FY 2027. Requires the increase in funds to be 11  
used for the Child Care Choice Voucher Program. 12

Am. Sub. H. B. No. 96  
As Passed by the House  
KIDCD21

\_\_\_\_\_ moved to amend as follows:

In the table on line 139001, in row AY, delete "\$327,850,000 1  
\$327,850,000" and insert "\$404,184,082 \$429,628,776" 2

In the table on line 139001, in rows AZ and BA, add \$76,334,082 to 3  
fiscal year 2026 and \$101,778,776 to fiscal year 2027 4

In line 139406, delete "forty-five" and insert "sixty" 5

In line 139411, delete "fifty" and insert "sixty" 6

The motion was \_\_\_\_\_ agreed to.

SYNOPSIS 7

**PFCC eligibility** 8

**Section 423.230** 9

Restores the Executive version's maximum amount of family 10  
income for purposes of initial eligibility for PFCC: 11

(1) For initial eligibility, from 145% PFL to 160% FPL; 12

Legislative Service Commission

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n6wdkigxqhejgowf6ebc6f

(2) For initial eligibility for special needs child care, 13  
from 150% FPL to 160% FPL. 14

(Maintains the provision setting 300% FPL as the maximum 15  
family income amount for continued PFCC eligibility.) 16

**Department of Children and Youth** 17

**Section 423.10** 18

Increases FED Fund 3V62 ALI 830605, TANF Block Grant, by 19  
\$76,334,082 in FY 2026 and \$101,778,776 in FY 2027. 20