

**Ohio General Assembly
Senate Finance Committee
Testimony
May 27-30, 2025**

To: Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
Senator Brian Chavez, Vice Chair
Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson, Ranking Member

Good evening! My name is John C. Jones, and I serve as President and CEO of HOPE Toledo, located in Toledo, Ohio, and the County of Lucas. I am grateful for the opportunity to present before this Committee to share our significant opportunity for expanded access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare both in our State and our Region. I will also share a potential pathway towards a solution for children and families.

We are seeking a change to the Ohio Revised Code, section 5705.19, which would add a division to the more than fifty existing categories, allowing for taxing authority to be granted to a 501(c)(3) organization with approval from the Board of County Commissioners. This additional division will have a specific focus on early childhood education.

In Lucas County today, less than 30% of children who enter kindergarten are assessed at the “demonstrating” level on the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). This statistic alone provides insight into what the future projection of a child may be, as we know that when a child does not enter kindergarten ready to learn, it impacts their success by third grade, eighth grade, high school graduation, and ultimately their ability to earn over their lifetime. We also know, based on what the research suggests, that children and families with access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare also experience better physical and mental health outcomes.

According to a report released in 2023 by the Council for A Strong America, our state loses nearly \$4 billion annually in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue due to a lack of adequate access to childcare and early learning. Additionally, we know that nearly 40% of families across Ohio are living in a “childcare desert,” meaning there are more than three children under the age of five for every licensed childcare slot. The data also tells us that the cost for most families is unaffordable, with the average cost for childcare and early learning ranging from \$12,000 to \$17,000 per child per year. With nearly 65% of parents with children under the age of five in the workforce, the need for affordable, accessible, and available services is critical, now more than ever.

HOPE Toledo’s mission is to support and ensure high-quality education from birth to career – in preschool, postsecondary, and trade school – for every young person in the Northwest Ohio region, creating generational economic change to better families and community.”

We know that our parents want to work and need to afford high-quality childcare and early learning services. In Lucas County, we believe one pathway toward a solution is to secure support from the voters for a locally dedicated fund for children. This amendment is vital for the economic mobility of our residents and for the development of our children. Please be clear, we are not seeking funding through this amendment, but rather

we are seeking the opportunity to allow the voters of our County to decide and choose to support our children and families.

In closing, Ohio and Lucas County are on the cusp of significant economic opportunity. The only way to fully realize that opportunity is to unleash and support the power of our people within the workforce. Supporting families with tuition credits to access early childhood education and childcare opportunities will impact our entire community, from our businesses to our school districts to our community and grassroots organizations. Now is our time for growth! Now is our time to seize this unique opportunity.

Thank you again for the time to listen to our commentary and request during this hearing!