

Marquita McClendon
CEO
Friday, June 2, 2025
Testimony on *Sub Bill* House Bill 96

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to allow me to provide my testimony today on HB 96.

My name is Marquita McClendon, I am the business owner of Future Achievers Academy, and I represent the CEO Project. I am writing to you as a concerned Ohioan business owner regarding the pressing economic issues we are currently facing, particularly in relation to federal funding.

In the revision of the bill, the language pertaining to the Peer Review Appeal Process has been excised, and I respectfully urge you to consider reinstating this critical provision. As childcare providers, we are subject to inspections that are intended to ensure the maintenance of a safe and regulated environment for the children under our care. This responsibility is one we collectively embrace with the utmost seriousness, not only because of our commitment to the welfare of the children but also because our professional licensure is contingent upon it. It is imperative that every business has the right to appeal to decisions made within a bureaucratic system that can be punitive in nature. The proposed peer review process would engage other small businesses with expertise in the field in the compliance evaluation process, rather than relying solely on a system overseen by individuals who may lack practical experience in job creation. The ramifications of losing a Step Up to Quality rating for small childcare providers are significant, resulting in substantial financial losses. Therefore, it is critical that we establish a robust appeals process that reflects the seriousness of this situation for small businesses in our sector.

The Tri-share bill has been removed from the legislative proposal; nevertheless, we now have SB 177, referred to as the Workforce Investment Now (WIN) for Child Care Pilot Program endorsed by Senator Blessings. This legislation endeavors to enhance the retention of childcare professionals by establishing competitive wage packages. Furthermore, it promotes workforce development and enables us to provide staff with attractive salaries while simultaneously allowing their children to attend the childcare center free of charge. The WIN Pilot Program represents a thoughtful, much-needed approach to workforce support and childcare sustainability.

"High-quality childcare is key to improving tomorrow's workforce in Ohio" written by Rob Moore from the Ohio Capital Journal on March 7, 2024. In the article, Steve Stivers, president and CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, states that workers need childcare options if they want to go to work. If childcare options are too expensive or not readily available, potential workers will opt out of the workforce." Ohio continues to fall short of meeting the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) threshold of 300% like other thriving high quality childcare states, which is essential for stabilizing the workforce industry. Currently, the state operates at only 145% of the FPL, a situation that has persisted for years and remains inadequate in addressing the pressing needs of the population. This ongoing disparity hampers efforts to enhance workforce stability and economic security for many residents.

Transitioning from an Attendance Policy to an Enrollment Policy will alleviate the financial burden imposed on businesses, which currently absorb the costs associated with employee compensation and overhead when clients fail to utilize childcare services. Operating a small business within this sector typically involves navigating narrow profit margins, as financial gain is not the primary incentive for entering this industry. It is crucial to remove barriers that render it cost-prohibitive for businesses to meet the childcare needs of families.

Despite the commendable progress reflected in this budget toward addressing the childcare crisis in Ohio, we still face an acute shortage of qualified personnel who need to fill the essential roles within our industry. The workforce represents the foundation of our sector, and I encourage us to pursue innovative solutions for our thriving childcare system that will engage and attract more individuals to alleviate this escalating challenge.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response and to seeing meaningful action taken to address these challenges.

Blessings,

Marquita McClendon

