

June 6, 2025
Alescia Harris
Marvellous Minds Childcare
Testimony on Senate Bill 177

Good morning Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Alescia Harris, I have been caring for children for almost 30 years. I am the owner of Marvellous Minds Childcare located in Lima, Ohio, and I represent the CEO Project. I am here to ask that you support Ohio's children, families, and childcare providers, by providing a more comprehensive funding approach to childcare, allowing transparency and clarity through peer reviews, and by raising Ohio to the federal poverty level.

Childcare providers are the unsung heroes of our communities, laying the foundation for future generations. Increased funding will encourage more small businesses to be created that nurture, protect, and educate the children within our communities. I am requesting that you support childcare providers by adding Senate Bill 177 to the budget. This business friendly bill, supported by the Ohio Chamber, allows child care employees free childcare in exchange for work. If a childcare worker is hired by a childcare provider, they would receive their hourly rate, but their child would receive free care. The state would pay for that care, and the government would collect the taxes on the salary of the employee. These workers act as a multiplier because they then open up full classrooms for children to attend that childcare business. Most childcare costs are so high due to the lack of spots available. This is a supply problem that is solved with a workforce development strategy. Put people to work in childcare so that they can put other people back to work throughout our state. Let's support those who dedicate their lives to shaping the minds of tomorrow.

We are last in the nation on how we fund childcare at 145% poverty level. I am asking that you move that level to the Governor's proposed 160% federal poverty level. The price of everything is being raised, and our parents are trying their hardest to work and provide for their children. When you put money into eligibility, it secures our client's ability to plan financially – therefore helping us plan financially. By raising Ohio to the federal poverty level, more families will be eligible to receive assistance with care thus contributing to the economy as they work to provide for their families. Childcare is worth the investment. Let's support those who dedicate their lives to shaping the minds of tomorrow.

In the substitute version of the bill the Peer Review Appeal Process language was removed and I am here to ask that you reinstate that language. As a childcare provider we are inspected to make sure that we are providing a safe and regulated environment for the children we care for. This is something we all take very seriously, not only because we believe in caring for our children but also because our license depends on it. Some inspection processes are inconsistent and leave us more confused instead of guided toward improvement. Every business should have the right to appeal a bureaucratic punitive system. The vast majority of violations are not dealing with safety issues but instead are infractions related to sanitation, record keeping and documentation issues and the like.

This peer review process allows other small businesses who are experts in the field to be involved in the compliance process instead of only having a system run solely by individuals that have never been in the real world of job creation. When small business childcare providers lose their Step Up To Quality rating they lose real dollars. This is a serious matter for small businesses and we want a serious appeals process in place. Let's support those who dedicate their lives to shaping the minds of tomorrow.

Going from an Attendance Policy to Enrollment Policy will now take the financial burden off of the businesses who have to eat the cost of employee pay and overhead costs when a client does not bring their child in for care. Running a small business in this industry is based on tight margins and we do not get into this industry to make millions of dollars. It is important to eliminate barriers to businesses that make it cost prohibitive when serving the needs of families who need childcare services.

In closing, I would like to state that It is important to point out that although this budget makes many strides in the right direction toward helping the child care crisis in Ohio, we are still left with an extreme shortage of quality workers who are needed to fill the positions in our industry. Workers are the backbone of our industry and I hope that we engage more ways to bring about smart solutions to this growing problem. Let's support those who dedicate their lives to shaping the minds of tomorrow.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
Alescia Marvelle Harris