

Deanna Szente

Family Action Network Parent Advocate

May 13, 2025

Ohio Senate Health Committee Chairperson Huffman, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

My name is Deanna Szente, and I am a parent from Lorain County. I am here today to urge you to restore the Governor's budget proposal, which included critical investments in child care, maternal and infant health, and early learning.

As someone who is a proud mom of three wonderful children: a 5, 4, and a 2 year old. My youngest son has been diagnosed with autism, and we work hard to support him through therapy, with a minimum of three appointments a week, flex schedules, and multiple waitlists for additional services. Along this journey, I've found strength and support through local Parent Cafes and Triple P Discussion Groups, which led me to DCY Family Listening Sessions and eventually to Groundwork Ohio. I'm passionate about ensuring that all families, no matter their circumstances, have access to the resources they need. Currently, I serve as a board member for Lorain with Littles, an amazing local group where we organize monthly playdates, attend community events and fairs, and make valuable resources available to families

Groundwork Ohio has outlined key priorities that will strengthen our state's early childhood system, including:

- **Child Care Crisis:** RESTORE publicly funded child care eligibility to 160% of FPL and RESTORE the Child Care Choice Voucher program to \$75M in FY26 and \$150M in FY27.
- **Economic Stability:** RESTORE the proposed refundable Child Tax Credit of up to \$1,000 per child under age 7.
- **Home Visiting:** RESTORE \$22.5 million in proposed investment in this evidence-based programming.
- **Infant & Maternal Mortality:** RESTORE the originally proposed infant vitality funds to \$7.5M each fiscal year.
- **Medicaid Access for Moms and Babies:** RESTORE existing law requiring multi-year continuous Medicaid enrollment for babies ages 0-3 championed by House leaders last budget cycle. STOP restrictions on the use of doula services to Medicaid eligible women.

- Lead Poisoning: RESTORE funding for the Lead Safe Home and Lead Abatement programs within the Ohio Department of Health.
- Tobacco Use: RESTORE funding for prevention programming.
- Early Learning & Literacy: RESTORE requirements to integrate the science of reading in early learning; RESTORE additional funding for the Governor's 3 Imagination Library; RESTORE the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment—the only tool the state has to understand the impact of early childhood experiences for every child.

These investments will not only help children thrive but also boost Ohio's workforce and economy. I urge you to fully fund these initiatives to ensure every child gets the best start in life. Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Deanna Szente