

Holly Unger

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 Holly Unger, and I am a parent from Knox 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 has adopted nine children, I know firsthand the challenges families face in accessing quality, affordable child care. Early Head Start and Head Start were lifelines for my family—not only providing critical early education for my children but also supporting me as a parent. These programs gave me the tools and confidence to become an advocate, eventually serving on both the Region V and National Head Start boards to represent families like mine. The high cost of child care has forced our family to make incredibly difficult decisions, such as choosing between financial stability and caregiving. Now, as a SNAP-Ed educator, I continue working to ensure families in my community have the resources they need to live healthier, more secure lives. My journey is a testament to why investments in Head Start, home visiting, and affordable child care are not just helpful—they're essential for helping families thrive. I know firsthand how important it is to support young children and working 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,

Holly Unger