

# Testimony Before Ohio Senate - May 12, 2025

RE: The Right to appeal Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) decisions

Presented by Morgan Brown

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 96. My name is Morgan Brown, and I am a childcare center owner here representing the CEO Project. I am here to speak in support of ensuring that childcare small business owners have the right to appeal SUTQ decisions related to quality ratings—understanding that these decisions have a direct impact on our livelihoods and the thousands of families we serve.

Childcare is the system that allows individuals to work and provide for their families. When we strengthen childcare—and when it is done correctly—we strengthen the workforce, improve school readiness, and support economic development. Yet despite the essential nature of this service, we remain underfunded, overregulated, and widely misunderstood.

The crisis is not that we are ineffective business owners. In fact, independent childcare providers make up over 90% of the childcare market in the United States. Nor is the crisis that we don't care—quite the opposite. We are deeply invested in our communities and in our work.

The crisis is that we are being asked to manage, care for, and advocate for society's most vulnerable population—to meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of young children and their families—while simultaneously navigating complex licensing standards and early education expectations. And we do this without adequate resources, without the ability to pay our staff a livable wage or offer benefits, without acknowledgment of the national strain on the childcare industry, and without the professional respect of being funded in a way that makes this work sustainable.

And we do this—every day.

So when we fall short—especially in cases that are not related to child safety but are instead tied to paperwork, technicalities, or timelines—we deserve opportunities for mediation and restoration. There must be an equitable system in place that allows for

due process. As business owners, we must be able to appeal decisions that lower our ratings or have the potential to close our programs altogether.

Currently, providers are given only seven calendar days to file an appeal. This is not equitable. It does not allow sufficient time to obtain counsel or respond with the care and preparation that defending a business deserves. There is no peer review component to the process. And business owners are not meaningfully heard before decisions are finalized.

Without an effective appeal system, quality becomes subjective. One licensing specialist's decision can determine the fate of an entire childcare business.

In closing, we need an appeal system that is:

- Accessible — with a minimum of a 90-day window to appeal;
- Equitable — one that understands the realities of small and minority-owned programs;
- Informed by peers — with experienced childcare business owners participating in the review process;
- Protective of families — because when businesses are shut down without context or opportunity for response, it is children and working families who suffer the most.

I urge this body to strengthen the appeal rights of providers and ensure our voices remain part of the quality conversation—not after decisions are made, but throughout the process.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Ohio's children— and to the educators that make everyday possible.