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Testimony on House Bill 96

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 Tashianna Kwakye, and I operate several childcare programs in Columbus, Dayton, Westerville, and Warren. I also represent the CEO Project. I am here to ask you to support Ohio kids, families, and childcare providers by including the childcare improvements outlined in Governor DeWine's executive budget.

As a business owner in Ohio, I am running out of options to support our families and keep our doors open. Nearly 50% of our employees are parents who need help with affording childcare. While we offer a generous discount to attract employees, an employee with two children spends half their earnings to pay for childcare. Free childcare is now one of the most sought-after benefits when hiring candidates. I ask you to approve free childcare for childcare workers to help us strengthen our infrastructure. Free childcare is also crucial to our foster/kinship care families (and families without stable housing), who often do not qualify for assistance and have exhausted resources. 30 percent of our families are households that provide foster or kinship care, or do not have stable housing.

What I am describing to you is more than numbers or statistics. These are accounts of the families I serve every day. What I am describing is life for 80 percent of our families. But this is reality for many of your constituents.

Additionally, I ask that you raise the eligibility rates for Publicly Funded Childcare. The average cost for childcare annually for each child is \$12-15,000. Workers are forced to stay home because they cannot afford the tuition rates. Raising the eligibility rate to 300% is a win-win for all of us. It would boost our economy by helping more workers to afford childcare, re-enter the workforce, and generate more revenue in our state.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the committee, we do not take lightly the idea that the decisions you must make regarding this budget are a great responsibility. The people of Ohio have faith that you will act in

our best interest. We ask you to remember the most fragile of us when you consider the policies you choose.

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

Tashiana O'Keefe