

**Testimony submitted to the Senate Health Committee
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**Carole Beaty, MPOD
Chief Program Officer, Family & Workforce
The Centers**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 96. My name Carole Beaty and I serve as the Chief of Family and Workforce Programs at The Centers in Cuyahoga County. The Centers serves nearly 20,000 people at 11 locations throughout Greater Cleveland to provide access to integrated healthcare services, early childhood education, family support, workforce development, and youth residential treatment.

Today I will focus my testimony on early childhood issues in the State Budget that impact the more than 1,500 children we serve in our six top-rated early learning centers in Cuyahoga County. Our CEO Eric Morse looks forward to testifying before the Senate Finance Committee later this month on budget issues impacting The Centers' other program areas.

From birth to age 5, children learn at a speed unmatched for the rest of their lives; and children who receive high-quality early childhood education perform better in STEM subjects through high school. However, quality early childhood education is increasingly challenging to access. In Cuyahoga County, there are six children for every one seat in a quality-rated early learning center. Organizations that provide early childhood education services today struggle to keep classrooms open because finding qualified candidates to fill vacancies is extremely difficult. In recent years, nearly 1 in 5 early childhood educators left the field and more than half of Ohio child care programs report staffing shortages that limit available slots for families.

We also know that child care is one of the largest expenses families face and limited supply of affordable, quality care may force parents to miss work or exit the workforce entirely, leaving families financially unstable, employers scrambling to fill jobs, and young children missing opportunities to learn and grow. A recent study in Cuyahoga County estimated that our local economy misses out on \$646 million dollars every year as the result of inadequate childcare. Another survey showed that 7 out of every 10 childcare providers in the county report having low enrollment and only filling 75% of their capacity due to a lack of staff.

To address these urgent gaps in access, The Centers join Groundwork Ohio and other early childhood advocates in urging the Senate to make meaningful investments in early childhood education in H.B. 96 through the following measures:

1. Restore the \$100 million in TANF funds removed by the House from Governor DeWine's proposed budget for Child Care to support working families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
2. Restore the Governor's proposal to raise Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) initial eligibility to 160 % FPL
3. Restore the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, Ohio's only statewide measure of early learning impact.



HEADQUARTERS

4500 Euclid Avenue | Cleveland, Ohio 44103
216.432.7200 | thecentersohio.org | [f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [o](#)

The costs of these proposals are modest compared to the estimated \$5.5 billion dollars Ohio's economy loses each year due to child care related workforce losses. Together these investments would ensure more parents are able to work, more businesses are able to retain employees, and more children enter kindergarten with the tools they need to succeed.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.