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**Committees:**

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Chair **O'Brien**, Vice-chair **Gavarone**, Ranking Member **Smith**, and members of the Senate **Local Government** Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for Senate Bill **141**, to authorize local citizens to decide how they will support pre-kindergarten educational programs.

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), in 2023 less than 20% of all 3 and 4 year old children in the state of Ohio were enrolled in a state-certified early childhood education program, totaling only about 18,000 preschool attendees. If we include Head Start students, we only have about 20% of Ohio youth enrolled by age 4. We know that access to these programs is a financial burden for families enrolling their children in quality childcare. Equally troubling are the number of available slots and the student-to-teacher ratios within these programs. In the same NIEER report, the State of Ohio only meets 5 out of 10 requirements for adequate childcare regulation throughout the state.

Additionally, in a report released this year by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, our state is said to lose almost \$5.5 billion annually in waged earnings and revenue due to a lack of adequate childcare for those early years.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 40% of families across Ohio are living in a “childcare desert,”<sup>2</sup> meaning there are more than three children under the age of five for every

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Untapped-Potential-Ohio.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://policymattersohio.org/research/ohios-childcare-crisis/#:~:text=39%25%20of%20Ohioans%20live%20in,children%20as%20licensed%20childcare%20slots.>

licensed childcare slot. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average cost for childcare and early education could be anywhere from \$12,000 to \$17,000 per child per year.<sup>3</sup> With nearly 65% of parents with children under the age of five in the workforce, the need for affordable, accessible, and available services has reached a critical point.

Specifically in Lucas County today, as reported by the United Way of Greater Toledo, less than 30% of children who enter kindergarten are at the “demonstrating” readiness level on the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).<sup>4</sup> While this statistic can be alarming, there are people around the state—and in my district of Lucas County specifically—who are working tirelessly to turn this tide. HOPE Toledo is a local program addressing this issue. HOPE Toledo partners with more than 20 childcare centers within Lucas County to ensure that students get individualized learning with low student-teacher ratios within their preschool classrooms. Furthermore, tuition credits for the programs are offered to families on a sliding-scale, so that finances do not have to be a barrier to the success of students in the program. Thus far, HOPE Toledo has helped more than 700 families in the Lucas County area to access high-quality pre-K education.<sup>5</sup>

Senate Bill 141 is legislation that will allow HOPE Toledo to introduce a local ballot measure that would create a tax levy to support its mission of educating children within Lucas County to prepare them for success.

Please give the Greater Toledo community the opportunity to decide how we would like to invest in our youth as they are the promise of tomorrow. I strongly urge this committee to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/OH>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unitedwaytoledo.org/community-results/education/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hope-toledo.org/annual-reports>

bring forward proponent testimony for Senate Bill 141, so that we keep pushing Ohio towards a bright and promising future that does not leave our children behind, but that relies on their potential. At this time, I welcome any questions that the committee may have.

