

**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
FY2018-2019 Operating Budget
Success by 6 – United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Stephanie Byrd
June 14, 2017**

Good Afternoon, Chairman Oelsalger, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the committee. I am Stephanie Byrd, Senior Vice President of Early Learning Strategies at United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Interim Executive Director of the Cincinnati Preschool Promise. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and give testimony concerning Ohio's early childhood education budget for state fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

I joined United Way as the ED of Success by 6 14 years ago, after more than 20 years as a hospital administrator. I made this change because of what I saw as an educational and social injustice for the youngest children in our community who, by no fault of their own, are deprived of the opportunity to experience high quality early learning experiences and thus are likely to not be prepared for kindergarten.

As a working mother, I was blessed with the ability to have my children experience high quality child care, preschool and enrichment programs. They started school ready to learn and fully prepared for the expectations of being in school. What was common practice for my children and others in my neighborhood unfortunately was not the experience of many children who lived in neighborhoods, not far from mine but with limited resources and limited access to early learning programs and experiences that would shape the start of their educational careers. So, in my experience, zip code mattered.

In my role as Executive Director of SB6 and now as Sr VP at United Way of Greater Cincinnati I have responsibility for driving strategies to increase kindergarten readiness in the 10-county United Way region, This is United Way's highest priority and we have a Bold Goal that by 2020, 85% of children in our region will be ready for kindergarten. Through our local work, we have been able to measure kindergarten readiness in Cincinnati Public Schools and have shown that children who have quality child care and quality preschool are more prepared for kindergarten than their peers who do not have those experiences., That is particularly true for children who are economically disadvantaged where participation in preschool makes a difference of 20 percentage points in children demonstrating readiness on the KRA and nearly a 25 percentage point difference in language and literacy.

Our local data shows that children who are ready for kindergarten are more likely to be reading proficiently by third grade. In a study we conducted a few years ago, of the 57% of children who were ready for kindergarten in CPS, 85 % were reading proficiently in third grade. In contrast, of the 43% of kindergarteners who were not ready, only 43% were reading proficiently by third grade – a 43 percentage point difference by third grade.

The Annie E. Case Foundation has found that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, and children who are poor are 13-17 times more likely to drop out if they are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. These are not the outcomes we want for our children nor our community.

Our local community is one of a handful of local models across the state that has taken a personal stake in the future of Ohio's kids by investing in early childhood education. In 2016, taxpayers approved a 5-year Cincinnati Public Schools levy that included \$33 million a year to strengthen K-12 education and \$15 million per year to expand access to quality preschool. The taxpayer investment with this levy for both K-12 and preschool education is \$5.35 per week for a home valued at \$100,000. We are excited about the commitment and leadership demonstrated by our community. Our taxpayers and our voters understand the importance of investing in early childhood education.

Cincinnati Public Schools has contracted with the United Way of Greater Cincinnati to manage preschool expansion. This new investment will be used in two ways. First, parents can use tuition credits for preschool at Cincinnati Public School and at high quality rated community providers with three or more stars in Step Up to Quality. Second, quality improvement grants will be available to help non-rated or one and two-star preschool providers pay the cost to achieve and maintain their quality rating. This commitment from our local community, however, relies upon continued state investments. We are doing everything we can, but we cannot do it alone. New funding for our preschool expansion is intended to be "last dollar," supplementing other federal and state funds that are currently available and being used for preschool such as publicly funded child care and public preschool subsidies.

Our efforts are made possible by the investments you have made in quality up to this point and we already see quality working for Ohio kids. Without state investments, we would not be in a position to leverage these public dollars to expand access in our community. As we work to improve access in Cincinnati, there is no denying that too few kids that Ohio serves have access to quality. We are making very slow progress for at-risk kids to access quality programs. Falling far short of statutory goals, only 35% of all state programs are even rated and a scant 13% of kids are being served by high quality programs. In our city, roughly 67% of programs are not rated, not including family child care homes.

This problem is compounded because the state has 38 counties that are being paid less than their similar counterparts to provide quality programs for kids which makes it much more difficult for them to make up any ground in improving access to quality. These serve 39,711 (38.8%) of all 102,421 children being served in the state of Ohio. Simply put, these counties remaining in the incorrect rate category provides an additional burden to kids gaining access to quality programs in these 38 counties--over a third of our state. Funding quality in Ohio cannot be achieved without addressing this significant gap first. If this accounting injustice is fixed, children in these 38 counties will have the funds they deserve to begin increasing their access to high-quality early childhood education programming.

For reference, the following is a list of those 38 counties who need to be moved to the correct peer group:

Allen	Erie	Licking	Sandusky
Ashland	Fairfield	Logan	Seneca
Athens	Greene	Lucas	Shelby
Auglaize	Hancock	Miami	Stark
Belmont	Harrison	Monroe	Trumbull
Carroll	Highland	Morrow	Union
Clark	Huron	Ottawa	Wayne
Columbiana	Knox	Pickaway	Wood
Cuyahoga	Lake	Portage	
Darke	Lawrence	Preble	

You will notice that Hamilton County is not on this list but we join advocates around the state in prioritizing this accounting injustice as the next critical step in building our quality system. We know what's good for the system is good for kids in Cincinnati.

To fix this problem, we need legislative action. The fix for all programs in the 38 counties has been costed out by the Department of Job and Family Services at \$65 million over the biennium. We have been thoughtful in asking you for a new investment of \$11 million per year to support our most at risk kids. This funding level will begin the fix for 13,840 of the 39,711 children in the 38 counties affected by the rate injustice that are in SUTQ star-rated programs. Correct funding levels with this new investment support better outcomes for Ohio kids through enriching curriculum aligned with standards, highly-educated teachers, lower teacher-to-student ratios and consistent communication and engagement with families.

We are also asking that, as you consider this new investment, that you first make sure we are protecting the existing system. The Ohio House proposed \$7.5 million worth of cuts between the Department of Education and the Department of Job and Family Services impacting Ohio's early childhood system. Additionally, the Ohio Senate cut an additional 4.3 million from the Department of Education. The bottom line is, Ohio's Early Childhood Education System has been cut by \$11.8 million since the executive budget proposal was first introduced, where the system was flat funded. We ask that you restore these funds and then begin to fund the 38-county fix to ensure that we don't take a step back at a time when we need to push forward.

Cincinnati programs are doing their best to provide quality programs to for children as we face the consequence of only rated providers being able to receive public funds as of July 1, 2020. Our local program relies on support from the state to maintain and increase the quality rated programs available to meet the needs of children and assure they are ready for kindergarten. The uncertainty for so many Ohio kids as the state fails to make adequate progress, however, is harrowing. That's why investments now are critical as we close out the last budget cycle before our 2020 benchmark arrives. And at a time when we need further investment to make any

progress forward, we face the possibility that even less kids will be served with the \$11.8 million of cuts made to Ohio kids served by our system. There is an appetite across the state that has the potential to really move the needle for early childhood education in Ohio. With local communities contributing now more than ever, the state cannot afford to take a step back at a time where it could be elevating and leveraging this local leadership and the potential of all Ohio kids.