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Ohio
United Way



**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
FY2018-2019 Operating Budget
Ohio United Way
Steven C. Hollon, President & CEO
June 14, 2017**

Good afternoon, Chairman Oelsalger, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Steven C. Hollon, President & CEO for Ohio United Way. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the executive, Ohio House and Senate proposal for Ohio's early childhood education budget for state fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

For many years, Ohio's United Ways have been early childhood advocates, investing millions of dollars to support quality early childhood education in their local communities. United Ways make these investments because we understand the importance and impact, knowing the first five years of life are when 90% of a child's brain development happens. Studies have shown, the earlier the investment, the greater the return, particularly when we are investing in the children with the greatest needs.

Because not all of Ohio's children have the same early experiences, we know that by age three, low income learners have heard an average of 30 million fewer words than their high income peers, and as such, their vocabulary is usually only half as large. Children who start behind too often stay behind.

United Way's acknowledge the investment in early education Ohio has made thus far, however, we also recognize that too few of the children Ohio serves have access to quality early education; and our progress toward achieving the Year 2020 Goals for the Step-Up to Quality is to-date slow for Ohio's at-risk children.

The access concerns are further compounded when we look at the thirty-eight counties that are being reimbursed for their services less than their similar counterparts – for providing the same level of quality childhood education services. The thirty-eight counties represent just over 38% of children who are served in the Step-Up to Quality programs. We believe this gap in reimbursement needs to be addressed for the programs in these thirty-eight counties if they are to have any chance locally of making advances in improving both access and quality. Our United Ways appreciate the investments the legislature has made in making sure Ohio's children have increased access to quality childhood education, however, we also believe this accounting injustice must be fixed moving forward. The thirty-eight counties impacted include:

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	

United Way believes correct funding levels will result in better outcomes for Ohio children through enriching curriculum aligned with standards, highly-educated teachers, lower teacher-to-student ratios and consistent communication and engagement with families. We understand this fix would necessitate a legislative response, with an estimated cost of \$65 million over the biennium.

Ohio's early childhood education system budget has been cut by \$11.8 million since the flat funded executive proposal was introduced. The Ohio House proposed \$7.5 million worth of cuts between the Department of Education (GRFT 200408 Early Childhood Education) and the Department of Job and Family Services (GRF 600413 Child Care State) impacting Ohio's early childhood system. Further, the Senate cut an additional \$4.2 million (GRF 600535 Early Care and Education) from the Department of Job and Family Services budget. We ask that you restore these funds and 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.

On behalf of the United Ways in Ohio, I urge you to restore full funding for early childhood education.



Steven C. Hollon, President & CEO
Ohio United Way