

**Senate Finance Committee
Senator Scott Oelslager, Chair**

Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 49

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United Way of Central Ohio (UWCO) is committed to reducing poverty in Franklin County. We do this by connecting individuals and families with high quality and high impact services, improving neighborhoods and ensuring systems and policies are effective. Our vision at United Way is to build a community where everyone has the aspirations, resources and opportunities to reach their potential. This is especially true for our youngest, most vulnerable and impressionable residents – children between the ages of birth and age five.

Forty percent of our children enter kindergarten without the skills needed to succeed. Forty percent of the children entering kindergarten do not recognize their letters, cannot count to 20 and/or cannot write their names. Without these skills, children enter kindergarten at a terrible disadvantage that they're unlikely to overcome. Research confirms that preschool-age years are critical for cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for success in primary and secondary school, college, work and life. Evidence overwhelmingly asserts that most brain development occurs during the first five years of life. Ninety percent of a child's brain development ensues as approximately 1 million neural connections occur every second during a child's early years. We have a short window of time to position all Ohio children for success.

It's important to note that all children do not have the same early experiences. Poor children's ability to develop on par with their peers is greatly compromised. By age three, low income learners have heard millions of fewer words than their higher income peers and their vocabulary is half as large. Kids who start behind often stay behind. This is why investments in early learning are so important.

Access to high quality early care and education is crucial to reducing poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty. It's estimated that the average middle-class child enters first grade with 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, whereas a child from a low-income family averages just 25 hours of one-on-one book reading. Early learning investments enable children from low-income families to participate in early learning activities that allow them to enter Kindergarten ready to learn and thrive. Therefore, UWCO asks that funding for GRF 600413 (Child Care State/MOE), GRF 200408 (Early Childhood Education), and GRF 600535 (Early Care and Education) be restored to levels proposed in the Executive Budget.

In addition to long-term economic gains, Ohio's early childhood system provides significant immediate benefits to our economy. Ohio's early childhood industry is comprised of many small businesses directly supporting thousands of employees. Early childhood programs help improve parent participation in the workforce; immediately helping Ohio's economy. Sixty-two percent of workers in Ohio have a child living in a household where both parents work. Providing children with high-quality early care and education opportunities allows working parents to be more productive at work and reduce absenteeism and tardiness. Ohio's early childhood system supports workforce development efforts by providing parents with safe and affordable learning environments for their children.

United Way of Central Ohio applauds state policy-makers for your continued commitment to creating a high quality and accessible early care and education

system. We commend Ohio's implementation of the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Program which encourages early care and education programs to earn 1 to 5-Star ratings based on adherence to nationally researched quality program standards. Unfortunately, Ohio is not on track with reaching its benchmark goal of having 25% of all publicly funded child care centers 4 to 5-star rated by June 30, 2017. Decreased state funding over the 2018-2019 biennium does not set the stage for success when Ohio is already significantly behind the June 30 benchmark established by state leaders.

Ohio's budget solution must allow children access to a safe, high quality, comprehensive early learning experience that ensures kindergarten readiness. These early experiences lay the groundwork for Ohio's economic future. As you embark on the tremendous challenge of creating a state budget that is balanced yet responsive to community needs, UWCO urges you to restore funding for GRF 600413 Child Care State/MOE in the Jobs and Family Services budget to \$84,732,730 each year as proposed by the Executive Budget. We also request that GRF 200408 Early Childhood Education in the Department of Education budget be restored to \$70.3 million each year as proposed by the Executive Budget. Lastly we request that GRF 600535 Early Care and Education in the Department of Job and Family Services budget be restored to \$143,436,793.

One dollar invested in early care and education saves our community as much as \$17 in future remedial instruction, public assistance and incarceration costs. Children who participate in early care and education programs have greater language skills, better mathematical ability and fewer behavior problems in school. As adults, these same children have higher graduation rates, higher post-high school education attainment, and higher rates of workforce participation. Early care and education is a workforce issue and an economic development issue.

High quality early care and education changes the trajectory of young lives. As you craft a state budget amid a terribly difficult fiscal environment, UWCO urges you to keep the following priorities in mind:

- Every child should have access to high quality early care and education.
- Early investments in a child's development have the highest returns for society and our economy.
- Helping Ohio children achieve their full potential requires policies that address the physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs of young children.
- Children are helped most and the economy strengthened when significant investment is made in early care and education programs.

United Way of Central Ohio welcomes the opportunity to work with you to meet the above priorities. Please do not hesitate to contact us for assistance and support.

In his report entitled “Investing in Our Young People,” Dr. James J. Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, stated:

“Investments in policies that intervene in the early years have very high rates of return while policies that intervene at later ages in the life cycle have low economic returns. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success.”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 49.

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