



Advocates for Ohio's Future

House Bill 145 - Written Proponent Testimony

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee - April 15, 2021

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld. I am the Director of Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF). Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of HB 145 which expands eligibility for publicly funded child care.

AOF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of over 500 state and local health and human services policy, advocacy and provider organizations that strive to strengthen families and communities through public funding for health, human services, and early care & education. We work to empower and support nonprofit organizations in the critical work they do, especially as it relates to lifting up the most vulnerable among us.

As a result of this pandemic, many Ohioans continue to struggle. Families across our state are challenged to maintain stable, affordable housing, cover utilities, obtain safe care for children during school hours and beyond; and find meaningful work after losing their jobs due to COVID-19. After parents manage to secure work, finding affordable, quality care for their children becomes a significant challenge. All parents deserve to know their child is in a safe, nurturing environment while they're at work and all kids regardless of race, class, gender, or zip code, deserve the best start to learning possible.

We are incredibly encouraged to see a bipartisan effort behind HB 145 and applaud the sponsor's and Governor DeWine's continuing mission to invest in our future - our children, despite challenging times. We have a moral and economic imperative to reach out and support at-risk children and their families to ensure all Ohioans, no matter their neighborhood, are given the chance to succeed, recover from this pandemic and climb the ladder up and out of poverty.

Ohio ranks near the bottom, among all 50 states, when it comes to helping parents afford high-quality child care. In Ohio, initial eligibility for publicly funded child care is set at 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL). That means a parent with two children can only make \$13.75 / hour or less (or \$28,548 or less annually). If she makes more, she makes too much to qualify for initial support. Only two states make it harder to qualify for support to afford child care.¹

Though we are thankful that Sub-HB 110 currently includes a slight increase in new GRF funding to expand access to child care by increasing the level of initial eligibility to 138% of poverty from 130%, and 150% for children with special needs, the goal of AOF has always been to see initial eligibility for public child care assistance restored to 200% of the federal poverty level. This will allow a single parent and child earning

¹ Schulman, Karen, "Early Progress: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2019," The National Women's Law Center, 2019, from Table 1a: Income Eligibility Limits for a Family of Three in 2018 and 2019, <https://bit.ly/3grjbym>

under \$34,840 and a family of three earning under \$43,920 to receive help paying for child care and free up more of their limited resources for basic needs like housing, food and utilities.²

HB 145 will allow thousands of children and families to take advantage of enrichment programs for early learners while supporting low-income working parents. Expanding eligibility through this bill supports the healthy growth and development of more children after an especially difficult period and helps families get back on track towards self-sustainability in the workforce.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 145. We urge you to support HB 145 and look forward to working with you on policies that stabilize and support families and allow our communities to come back safely and successfully.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>