



TESTIMONY OF:
Elizabeth Brown
Executive Director
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IN SUPPORT OF:
House Bill 145
Eligibility for Publicly Funded Child Care
House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee
April 15, 2021

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Minority Member Liston, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Families, Aging & Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Ohio House Bill 145.

My name is Erin Ryan and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network (WPPN), a coalition of nearly 40 organizations that advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and families. We believe that the measure of success for our state and communities is largely determined by the success of Ohio's women. Therefore, policymakers must advance public policies centered in equity, fairness, and justice that address the following issue areas:

1. Promoting an economic security agenda for women;
2. Ensuring fairness and opportunity in the workplace; and
3. Improving women's health and well-being

These policy goals guide WPPN's work and shaped our interest in testifying today as a proponent of House Bill 145, legislation that increases the initial eligibility to access publicly funded child care in Ohio to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

All parents, regardless of race, class, or zip code, deserve to go to work knowing that their kids have a safe, nurturing place to go. Unfortunately, high-quality child care is not affordable and accessible to all who need it, holding back Ohio families from reaching their full potential. This was true before the pandemic, and it remains even more pressing now, as families face even greater challenges to meeting their child care needs. **House Bill 145 would take immense steps**

forward in creating more opportunities for parents and guardians - especially mothers - to access care for their children, keeping Ohioans active in the workforce, helping kids to thrive, and supporting the economic growth of our communities.

Currently, our state's publicly funded child care system extends initial eligibility at 130% of the FLP. This equates to \$13.57 per hour for a family of three, which is far from an economically sufficient wage to support even their most basic needs, let alone the high costs of a high-quality child care program. The current standard fails to go far enough to fully encompass and support the children and families in Ohio who do not have access to quality, affordable child care. This disproportionately affects women, particularly women working in low-wage or part-time jobs, and these inequities have an even greater unequal burden on women of color and single mothers who face systemic barriers to accessing economic and employment opportunities which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The average cost of center-based child care in Ohio for infants is approximately \$10,009 a year, and home-based care totals around \$7,592 annually.¹ The US Department of Health and Human Services states that affordable child care should not cost more than 7% of a family's income; however, a single mother of two earning \$15 per hour spends half her income on child care. Yet, she makes too much to qualify for publicly funded child care given Ohio's low eligibility. Raising the initial eligibility for public child care aid to 200% of the FPL, as House Bill 145 does, would make her eligible for public support and alleviate this financial strain.

Access to child care is a crucial tool to ensure that working parents can meet their responsibilities of their job and their family, particularly now as our state moves towards recovery from the unprecedented economic crisis that hit with the pandemic. Due to the health and safety standards needed to control the spread of the virus, many child care providers were pushed out of business, while others have had to reduce their enrollment capacity. This means that many mothers no longer have a safe, affordable place to care for their children.

Since the start of the pandemic, nearly 3 million American women left the workforce, largely because the caregiving responsibilities in their families fell to women, and affordable child care was out of reach. Studies have shown that women ages 25-44 are three times as likely as men to be out of work during the pandemic due to disrupted child care arrangements. Women forced from the workforce have lost crucial wages that support their households. For many working mothers, the option to return to work is impossible without access to care for their children. Due to school closures and regulations on activities prompted by the COVID-19 outbreak, reliable child care and enrichment activities for young children are harder than ever to find.

¹<https://www.columbusparent.com/lifestyle/20191224/rising-cost-of-child-care#:~:text=Ohio%20fares%20a%20little%20better.up%20from%20%247%2C467%20last%20year.>

To recover, child care must be more widely available to struggling families across the state, particularly for families headed by Black and brown women who have shouldered the burden of the economic costs of the pandemic. By lifting the initial eligibility for publicly funded child care programs, House Bill 145 would offer greater economic stability to women who currently make too little to qualify, but don't make enough to afford a high-quality program on their own. This barrier to care pushes working parents out of the workforce, hurts the growth and development of children, and puts a strain on businesses to maintain employees. There is no doubt that expanded access to child care is key to rebuilding from this crisis, both for families and for businesses.

In addition to the economic benefits that both families and our state receive from creating greater opportunity to access high-quality care, children's future outcomes have also been shown to have a positive relationship to the accessibility and quality of child care and early childhood education they receive, further asserting the need for an equitable publicly-funded program in the state of Ohio.² These benefits extend beyond the individual impact on one child. Expanding the accessibility and affordability of child care has clear, undeniable connections to the workforce participation of working mothers and the economic stability of women and their families.

High-quality child care has long been difficult to afford in Ohio. Even before the pandemic, the high cost of child care put it out of reach for many working families. Ohio must take steps to reduce the cost of high-quality child care by implementing House Bill 145. The improvements to our state's child care system made under this bill would support working mothers' ability to provide for their families, which will play a foundational role in stabilizing businesses, rebuilding our economy, and helping all families thrive. **On behalf of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, I respectfully urge the committee to support and advance House Bill 145, making a true investment in families, communities, and our future.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions by email at ryan@innovationohio.org.

Sincerely,
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² <https://www.policymattersohio.org/blog/2019/03/26/working-families-need-affordable-accessible-child-care>