

Ohio House of Representatives
Families, Aging & Human Services
House Bill 145
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Chairman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member West and members of the committee, my name is Lalitha Pamidigantam and I am the Policy Analyst at YWCA Columbus. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 145, which would expand initial child care eligibility from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

YWCA Columbus has a 135 year history of serving women and children in our housing and childcare programs in the Central Ohio region. As a legacy institution that provides exceptional childcare that is ODJFS-licensed and Step Up to Quality, we are invested in building a public infrastructure for childcare to best support families in our region. Currently, of our population served in our before and afterschool care programs, 4% receive public assistance. This is where the greatest barriers to access exist; because these programs are fee-based, families who are ineligible for public assistance cannot send their children to such programs. This puts parents and guardians in a difficult position: to choose between looking after their child and looking for work. Anecdotally, parents have turned down the opportunity to send their children to our programs because they are ineligible for public assistance. This past year, we were only able to serve roughly one third of our usual numbers of children due to COVID-19. However, if this legislation were to pass, roughly 10 more families would benefit from childcare services at our programs. This legislation, in a normal school year, would allow closer to 30 more families served at our programs alone.

We are testifying today in favor of House Bill 145 to expand the initial child care eligibility from 130% to 200% because this expansion will allow more families to be served. The current standing at 130% of the poverty line only allows for a percentage of those struggling with childcare costs to benefit from public assistance. In 2018, the average hourly price of center-based childcare for a 4-year-old child represented 26% of the hourly median wage, which is high above the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommendation that affordable childcare not exceed 7% of a family's income. Access to childcare is a barrier that keeps families in poverty. Currently, a family receiving public assistance for childcare is capped at a salary of \$34,450. This makes it such that the potential of earning a higher salary will cause a loss of that assistance. A family of four with a household earning 200% of the poverty still cannot afford childcare-- in fact, costs double or triple in size if your salary increases even just slightly over 130% of the poverty line. This legislation strengthens public support around those who are among the most vulnerable, who need viable solutions to rise out of poverty.

Considering that women of color are more likely to experience poverty and therefore barriers to childcare, strengthening public infrastructure for childcare is essential. On average, female-headed households in Central Ohio are more likely to have lower median incomes than their male counterparts; and those with very young children appear most vulnerable. The difficulty for many of these women is the fact childcare is cited as one of the biggest expenses Ohio families face. This legislation provides support for more women who will be able to return to work with their children safely at childcare. Additionally, it will increase enrollment for childcare centers, of whom one out of every four were predicted by Action for Children to shut down earlier this year. House Bill 145 is a necessary step forward to strengthening support for our most vulnerable populations of Ohioans and is an investment into our youngest Ohioans.