



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee Testimony
Katie Kelly, Executive Director, PRE4CLE
May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Katie Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of [PRE4CLE](#). PRE4CLE is a public-private partnership between the Cleveland Public Schools, the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Cleveland business and civic leaders, and other community partners working to increase access to high-quality preschool to support greater kindergarten readiness and school success within the city of Cleveland.

We have strong evidence of the impact that investments in high-quality early education are working for Ohio. Prior to the pandemic, PRE4CLE successfully increased enrollment in high-quality preschool by 72% in the city of Cleveland. That gain resulted in an 8-percentage point increase in kindergarten readiness overall during a six-year period in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, as well as subsequent gains in kindergarten through third grade achievement during that same period.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare many of the weaknesses in our early education system, and we will highlight some of those for you here today. However, we also think that this is an opportunity to build a newly-resilient system that offers greater access to high-quality care and education to children, reliable and affordable care to families as they head back to work, and fair compensation for child care and early education professionals.

Through the lens of our previous work, our learnings, and our continued objectives, I would like to share our thoughts on HB 110, the main operating budget. In particular I will focus on what we believe it will take to best support our youngest learners as they grow and develop and support their families during this time of recovery. I will also share ideas on how to support our workforce in the early childhood space specifically.



Connecting Families with High-Quality, Affordable Preschool Education Opportunities

We are encouraged by Governor DeWine's and Director Halls' budgeted commitment to increasing the child care eligibility criteria for subsidized publicly funded child care from 130% to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in HB 110. We thank the House for retaining that investment. This is an important first step in fulfilling the stated commitment to raise eligibility to 150% FPL. ***Right now, Ohio sits in 49th place when it comes to our eligibility for publicly funded child care.*** At this critical moment in time, our youngest learners need more access to quality child care, not less.

We continue to urge the General Assembly to work towards aligning the eligibility levels of all early learning programs in Ohio at 200% of the federal poverty level to support Ohio's current working families and increase kindergarten readiness for our youngest children, and request the Senate raise the eligibility to 150% FPL in this budget as our first step towards that goal.

High-quality child care is a critical component of Ohio's early learning system, but for many parents, the price puts child care out of reach. National studies show that the lack of affordable child care can greatly decrease parent's productivity, including forcing some parents to quit or decrease work hours, pass up promotions, and miss work. In 2016, 75,669 Ohio parents quit a job, did not take a job, or greatly changed their job because of child care problems. Imagine what those number might look like at this time, a time when we know parents are struggling because of a loss of a job or reduced hours due to the pandemic. At a time when Ohio needs all those in the workforce to engage, a lack of high-quality child care should not be what holds a parent down from moving up the career ladder.



Early Education Quality

Cleveland is seeing strong results from Ohio's quality improvements in early education through the Step Up To Quality program. On average each year 17.0% more children in Cleveland who receive eight or more months in a highly-rated setting (3-5 starts in Step Up To Quality) enter kindergarten scoring in the top two bands of the KRA compared to their peers in unrated settings.

In order to maintain the gains that we have made in kindergarten readiness, both in Cleveland and across the state, we urge you to continue to support the Step Up To Quality system and the goals supporting all publicly-funded child care providers to reach a high-quality rating by 2025.

Additionally, the House added language that would designate a committee in each chamber to study the child care system, including Step Up To Quality, and identify sustainable funding for the initiative. We appreciate the House's intent to spend time ensuring this important workforce support is adequately funded and working as intended to provide all Ohio's children the early education needed to be successful in school and life. We look forward to participating in those hearings and stand ready to be a partner in efforts to improve our publicly funded child care system.

You have many important issues you are weighing in this budget, and we all appreciate the gravity of your task. What we would urge you to consider is the cost of waiting two more years to make these important state investments in our young children. Every biennium that we push the pause button on providing these opportunities for our children is allowing tens of thousands of Ohio children to miss an opportunity that is proven to give them a fair chance to succeed.

Thank you for your attention and I am always available to answer any questions.