**Senate Education Committee Hearing – SB 216**

**Testimony of Stephanie Wright Byrd**

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Good Afternoon Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, ranking member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the importance of continuing the statewide, required use of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. I am Stephanie Byrd, Senior Vice President, Early Learning Strategies at United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Interim Executive Director of the Cincinnati Preschool Promise.

The United Way of Greater Cincinnati includes a 10 -county region including Hamilton, Clermont, Brown Counties and Middletown in Butler County and six other counties in Northern Kentucky and Southeast Indiana. As the fifth largest United Way in the country we are working to make the region more vibrant and successful; to transform the quality of life for all – and make lasting change by getting more kids ready for school, more families stable and self-sufficient, and more people healthy. Five years ago, working with business and community leaders we adopted six bold goals in the areas of education income and health.

These goals reflect our community's collective vision for how to make our region stronger. You can see each of the Bold Goals at our website [www.uwgc.org](http://www.uwgc.org), but in early education we established a goal that 85% of children in the region would be ready for kindergarten by 2020.

We measure progress toward this goal using the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, looking specifically at the percent of children who are on track in literacy and who are demonstrating readiness across 40 school districts, as you might expect, the variability in the results is significant – from 24. 3% - 89.7% being on track in literacy and 12.2% – 79.4% demonstrating readiness. These results are reflective of significant differences in many factors that influence readiness, including access to quality early education and poverty.

* The percent of our region’s residents living in poverty has increased from 11% in 1970 to 14% in 2016.
* In Cincinnati, nearly one in three residents (30%) are living in poverty;
* The rate of child poverty in our region has doubled since 1970 so that now one in five children are growing up in poor households
* In Cincinnati access to quality preschool for the 9200 3 and 4-year olds who live there is limited to a capacity of approximately 4000 quality spaces.

Having a common measure across the diverse school districts and communities that make up our region has been instrumental in drawing attention to the importance of kindergarten readiness and focusing attention on increasing access to quality early learning programs and resources. Using data from the KRA and its predecessor the KRA-L, we have built community will across the region to include kindergarten readiness as a key education and community goal. The Clermont County Chamber includes kindergarten readiness in its Connect Clermont Lifelong Learning Strategy. The Middletown Community Foundation has established a long-term investment strategy Ready, which is focused on kindergarten readiness and school success. In Brown County the Ready Schools efforts have brought schools and community partners together to collaborate on creating school readiness tactics for children entering kindergarten. In Cincinnati, the case for the Cincinnati Preschool Promise, a $15 million per year investment to expand access to preschool over 5 years, was built on the trended KRA-L/KRA data and the ability show the connection to third grade reading. We see the KRA as an important measure of long term success and as a way of benchmarking our work with other similar work across the state like the Dayton Preschool Promise, Invest in Children and Pre4Cle in Cleveland.

We know from the recent Step Up to Quality validation study that quality programming is linked to better school readiness outcomes. This data is critical to measuring our progress as a state in kindergarten readiness, one of the most important drivers of school success. Children who are prepared for kindergarten are more likely to read proficiently by third grade. Children are learning to read through third grade and after that that read to learn.

The KRA is a relatively new tool, developed after many years of getting our communities accustomed to the KRA-L and the importance of measuring progress. Improvements have been made and more are needed, but it gives us a much clearer picture of the starting line for young children as they begin their education journey and it tells our region and our state, in a consistent way, how much more needs to be done to assure all children are ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten. As the saying goes, “what gets measured gets done.”