**Testimony Before the 12/6/17 Ohio Senate Education Committee**

**Regarding SB 216**

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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the changes to the use of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) proposed in SB 216.

I am speaking on behalf of United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Ohio United Way, which represents the majority of United Ways in Ohio. Ohio’s United Ways are the second largest funder, after government, of early care and education programs in our state. For many United Ways, investing in our youngest children before they enter school has been the most successful strategy for changing education and life success for at-risk children. For over twenty years, my United Way has invested up to $10 M per year to expand high quality learning opportunities for children birth to five. Stephanie Byrd has told you about our experience.

I am also a member of the Governor’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, which has been engaged through the development of the KRA-L and the KRA.

The KRA is the only comprehensive assessment currently in use for young children in Ohio. While we were most grateful for the KRA-L , because it gave private sector investors a consistent measure for the efficacy of the programs we invested in, we have always wanted a more comprehensive assessment because of the importance of social/emotional development to child success. The KRA measures math, language and literacy, physical well-being, social foundations (curiosity, initiative, planning and action, attention and persistence, creativity, innovation and invention, expression of ideas and feelings through arts) and social and emotional development (self-awareness, expression of emotion, self-comforting, self-regulation, sense of competence, attachment, interaction with adults, interactions with peers, and empathy).

The KRA provides teachers, parents, district personnel, and the public with important information about where children start school, their readiness to engage with the Kindergarten instruction, and whether interventions and/or supports are needed to maximize their success. The KRA gives an accurate picture of where our youngest students are upon arrival for their formal education. No other assessment both gives this full picture of the whole child AND is based on Ohio’s Early Learning and Development Standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in October 2012

A statewide assessment is critically important for Ohio to understand and plan for the needs of children, especially the 40% of those who come to Kindergarten not ready to learn. Not only does the KRA help teachers understand an individual child’s strengths and weaknesses as they enter school, but it gives us a snapshot of all our children and what our schools need to meet student needs. The advantage of having a test like this in place to help teachers identify needs early in a child’s education are enormous.

An additional benefit is that the KRA allows us tomeasure the efficacy of our private investments in quality early childhood education programs . Public and private investments in local communities and statewide are driven by this measure.

The KRA was created with teachers and educators in every part of its development and validation. It is based on standards that our state developed over the course of two years with child development experts and educators across Ohio.

Ohio has invested $5.5 million over last 5 years in the creation, training, and implementation of the KRA. It has only been in use since 2014, but the Ohio Department of Education has already made changes to improve the test and make it more effective for teachers. In 2015 the 63-item test was reduced to 50 items. Half are questions the teacher asks the child to answer or demonstrate, and half of are observations that the teacher makes about the child during everyday routines in the classroom and at school. Beginning this year, each child’s KRA results are available in real time in an individual student report accessible to their teacher. Teachers have two and a half months to complete the assessment and are allowed to begin assessing children up to two weeks before school starts, thus reducing classroom time used for the non-observational part of the assessment.

The first cohort of Kindergartners who were assessed using the KRA are in the 3rd grade this year, giving us data about the relationship between Kindergarten readiness and a student’s ability to read at grade level by the third grade. It would be a real loss to scrap the assessment just as Ohio’s investment is paying off.

Senators, thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.