

**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
FY2018-2019 Operating Budget
Coalition of Appalachian Development, Inc.
Ron Rees
June 13, 2017**

Good Afternoon, Chairman Oelsalger, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the committee. I am Ron Rees, Executive Director of the Coalition for Appalachian Development, Inc. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and give testimony concerning the Ohio's early childhood education budget for state fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

Over the past 48 years I have had the opportunity to work with young children as a social worker, therapist and administrator in social service, mental health and child welfare settings. On countless occasions I have had an opportunity to observe first-hand the lifelong impact of early childhood experiences. Today I come to you representing an agency that provides support, information and training to parents and childcare providers in 32 of Ohio's counties. I am coming to ask for your support in assuring the children in those 32 counties become capable, responsible adults who will be contributors to their communities.

Research of high-quality, intensive early childhood education programs for low-income children confirm lasting positive effects such as greater school success, higher graduation rates, lower juvenile crime, decreased need for special education services later, and lower adolescent pregnancy rates. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships, and better behavioral self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care. Inferior-quality care, at home or outside the home, can have harmful effects on language, social development, and school performance that are more difficult to ameliorate, especially for children in schools with fewer resources. The positive effects from high-quality programs and the negative effects from poor-quality programs are magnified for children from disadvantaged situations or with special needs, and yet these children are least likely to have access to quality early education and child care.

Decision makers in Ohio made a commitment years ago to transition all children in subsidized care to high quality settings. We are grateful for that commitment and the recognition of the importance of quality care. Unfortunately, we are behind schedule in that transition and will fall further behind without your intervention. Although the commitment made by the state was for 25% of the children to be in high quality care by now, only a little over 13% are in that environment. Far too few children have access to high quality care and that access is becoming more difficult due to closures of rated centers which cannot survive financially with the current level of support.

This problem is compounded because the state has 38 counties that are being paid less than their similar counterparts to provide quality programs for kids, making it much more difficult for them to improve access to quality. These counties serve 39,711 (38.8%) of all 102,421 children being served in the state of Ohio. Simply put, keeping a third of the counties in the incorrect rate category provides an additional barrier to kids gaining access to quality programs. Funding quality in Ohio cannot be achieved without addressing this significant gap first. If this accounting injustice is fixed, children in these 38 counties will have the funds they deserve to begin increasing their access to high-quality early childhood education programming.

For reference, the following is a list of those 38 counties who need to be moved to the correct peer group:

Allen	Erie	Licking	Sandusky
Ashland	Fairfield	Logan	Seneca
Athens	Greene	Lucas	Shelby

Auglaize	Hancock	Miami	Stark
Belmont	Harrison	Monroe	Trumbull
Carroll	Highland	Morrow	Union
Clark	Huron	Ottawa	Wayne
Columbiana	Knox	Pickaway	Wood
Cuyahoga	Lake	Portage	
Darke	Lawrence	Preble	

Children and families in Appalachia have even less access to childcare than other areas of Ohio. In other areas of the state there are 2.8 children for every childcare slot. In Appalachia there are 3.8. Of the 13,840 children in Ohio who will have better access to quality care with the requested change, 1,116 live in Appalachia.

This fix necessitates a legislative response and has been cost out by the Department at \$65 million over the biennium. Today we have been thoughtful in asking you for a new investment of \$11 million per year to support our most at risk kids. This funding level will begin the fix for 13,840 of the 39,711 children served in the 38 counties affected by the rate injustice that are in SUTQ star-rated programs. Correct funding levels with this new investment supports better outcomes for Ohio kids through enriching curriculum aligned with standards, highly-educated teachers, lower teacher-to-student ratios and consistent communication and engagement with families.

We are also asking that as you consider this new investment that we first make sure we are protecting the existing system. Ohio's early childhood education system budget has been cut by \$11.7 since the flat funded executive proposal was introduced. The Ohio House proposed \$7.5 million worth of cuts between the Department of Education (GRFT 200408 Early Childhood Education) and the Department of Job and Family Services (GRF 600413 Child Care State/MOE impacting Ohio's early childhood system. Further, the Senate cut an additional \$4.2 million (GRF 600535 Early Care and Education) from the Department of Job and Family Services Budget. We ask that you restore these funds and then begin to fund the 38 county fix to ensure that we don't take a step back at a time when we need to push forward.

COAD serves 11 of the 38 counties that are currently in the wrong rate category. Due to this funding inequity, we have lost 115 licensed childcare providers in those 11 counties over the last four years. A number of the center based programs were quality rated but could not stay open because the funding did not support a quality rating. Although some of these centers had been in operation for as long as 15 or 20 years they were no longer able to keep their doors open. Your intervention is critical to stop the loss of opportunity for even more children.