



**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Committee – RE: Substitute House Bill 33**

**Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood Written Testimony
Submitted April 20, 2023**

Chairman Edwards, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for your time and attention considering the following state-budget-related requests from the Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood – Invest in Children.

We are appreciative that Substitute House Bill 33 maintains the Governor’s proposed increase of initial eligibility for publicly funded childcare (PFCC) to 160 percent of the FPL and maintains the creation of an Ohio Department of Children and Youth. These are two important and needed investments. However, we are very concerned that two items of critical importance to both workforce development, and the early care and education of young children, have been eliminated, or otherwise left unaddressed.

We ask that the \$150 million of ARPA funding dedicated in the original version of HB-33 to support childcare scholarships and development of additional capacity in available infant-toddler care, be reinstated. This investment would support the workforce and agencies that enable many Ohioans to go to work each day, by establishing a childcare scholarship for critical occupations and other direct service professionals as identified in consultation with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation. Individuals awarded scholarships would be required to have incomes that are less than 200% of the federal poverty level. Additionally, these funds would support increased access to licensed childcare programs for infants and toddlers and streamline administrative efficiency of the childcare program, in accordance with the program guidelines for the use of these funds

Child care access is a basic social determinant of work for many people. Availability and cost of care are the two biggest barriers for families seeking child care. If parents cannot find child care, they cannot reliably show up to work. If they are not confident their child is well cared for in a supportive and enriching environment, they cannot focus their attention on work. Statewide, and locally in Cuyahoga County, families with infants and toddlers struggle to find child care because there are simply not enough seats to serve the needs. Additionally, many are unable to afford child care. Individuals working in critical and direct care occupations—including child care professionals themselves—provide invaluable services to our communities and are often paid at relatively low wages. Those with young children need child care to do their important work yet the cost is difficult if not impossible to manage. Ohio must make substantial investments in supporting these essential workers, while simultaneously working to build capacity in available care. While ARPA funding is “one-time” money, it is essential it be invested in beginning to address the systemic problems within the provision of early care and education that are limiting the ability of Ohio families to work and thrive.

We ask support for an amendment to add \$30 million in new GFR dollars be dedicated to award child care infrastructure grants. Supported by Groundwork Ohio, and early childhood advocates across the state, this funding would assist in providing safe and developmentally appropriate child care for infants and toddlers in Appalachian communities and communities with high infant mortality rates. Such grants could be used to provide workforce supports, family engagement and support, mental health services, professional development and technical assistance, facilities improvement, and classroom supplies. Eligible applicants include early childhood collaboratives, nonprofit and for-profit programs, early head start programs, local government entities and childcare resources and referral organizations.

Cuyahoga County has both Black and Overall infant mortality rates that are among the highest in the state, and well behind recognized public health goals for reduction in infant deaths. When parents have reliable and professional infant and toddler care, they can be much less reliant on a changing patchwork of informal care options that often result in their child not getting the direct attention and supervision necessary for safety and health. A meaningful number of infant sleep related deaths in Ohio occur when babies are not in the care of their parents, but have been left with family, friends or the child's older siblings, who are not trained in child supervision or safe sleep practices. Additionally, when young parents are connected to a licensed child care facility, they are able to access additional support and information resources that are tailored to their needs.

With these investments focused on communities with the highest need, state and local agencies can work together to address multiple important issues.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let us know now, or anytime, if you have questions or need of additional information.

FOLLOW UP CONTACT INFORMATION

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