



**Ohio House of Representatives  
House Finance Committee  
Substitute House Bill 7  
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Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Substitute House Bill 7, co-sponsored by Representatives White (R-Kettering) and Humphrey (D-Columbus).

As you heard, from the Sponsors last week, this bill is sharply focused on improving infant/toddler services and supports for Ohio families who need it the most, and you now have a chance to show these children and families that they matter.

My name is Julie Stone, and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the Ohio Head Start Association. For the purposes of this testimony, when I refer to Head Start, I am referring to the Head Start preschool programs that serves 27,000 three- to five-year-old children, and the Early Head Start programs that serve 6,500 infants, toddlers and pregnant women throughout Ohio. In Ohio, the Head Start community includes sixty provider agencies, with over 8,000 staff serving children in nearly 500 licensed centers.

Because Head Start is federally funded through grants that come directly to local providers, many people are not aware of the critical role Head start plays for Ohio's zero to five population and their families. Head Start and Early Head Start provide child-centered, family focused, comprehensive community-based services to our most vulnerable children and families. That includes pregnant women, infants, toddlers and children up to age 5, whose income is less than the Federal Poverty Level, families receiving SNAP benefits, and children who are homeless, in foster care and Kinship Families. And Head Start services are uniquely available to children with disabilities and other special needs.

Head Start's proven model of comprehensive support for children and families experiencing poverty is foundational to Ohio's Early Care and Education ecosystem. It is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States and we provide comprehensive education, health, nutrition, dental, mental health, social services as well as parent engagement and empowerment opportunities.

We are also partners with the state, as half of Ohio's Head Start provider also operate Early Childhood Education slots funded by the Ohio Department of Education, and one third operate Publicly Funded Child Care slots funded by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Many of our 60 Head Start providers also engage in Child Care Partnerships with local community or family home providers. For example, more than one quarter of our Early Head Start moms and children are served through these partnerships. The Head Start program enters into an arrangement with a community-based center or family home Child Care provider where the partner is supported with resources such as funds, highly qualified staff, technical assistance, coaching, supplies and/or materials to provide services that comply with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Because Head Start operates with the requirement to assess and meet unique local community needs, Head Start and Early Head Start services are provided in a variety of settings including centers, family child care, and sometimes the child's own home. The federal to local grants are administered by Community Action Agencies, Private and Public Non-Profits, School Systems, and Universities. Our programs also really engage parents or other key family members in positive relationships, with a focus on family wellbeing. Head Start parents participate in leadership roles, including having a voice in program operations.

We urge you to pass Substitute House Bill 7 and invest in Ohio's young children and families through all the provisions of this bill. And in doing so you will be leveraging Head Start to build more quality capacity to support the unique needs of infants and toddlers.

Your vote for will provide funding for the Early Head Start Resiliency Grant Pilot Program. This pilot will leverage federal funding and support the development of quality comprehensive care in communities with a prioritization of Appalachian, rural, urban and other communities where there are high rates of infant mortality and shortages of access to quality child care to serve more infants, toddlers and their families at risk of or engaged in the child welfare or foster care systems.

We must build a stronger foundation for Ohio's children. Our continued lack of investment in our state's young children and child care leaves Ohio's children behind and jeopardizes our future workforce.

It is now a crisis that must be addressed because only 38% of Ohio kindergartners entering the classroom ready to learn, and only 38% of Ohio students proficient in 8th grade math.

Given these statistics, it should not surprise any of us that only about half of eligible low-income children ages 0-5, living under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, are able to access any state funded child care, preschool or Head Start. It has to start sooner. Connecting moms and children to services they need sooner – rather than too late – can make THE difference. Our young children and our future workforce are counting on you.

Head Start has a long and deep history of commitment to quality, and has a proven track record of achieving positive outcomes for Ohio's children and families in greatest need. Our role as a foundation of the state's Early Care and Education system is crucial to the success of all of Ohio's children and we stand ready to find ways to build on the strength of our foundation on that behalf.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please reach out to me if you have any questions.

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