

**Ohio House of Representatives**  
**Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services**  
**House Bill 33**  
**Loria Jarvis, Parent from Clermont County**  
**March 14, 2023**

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Lori Jarvis, and I am a parent from Amelia, Ohio in Clermont County.

Today, I join with fellow parents and advocates from across Ohio in thanking you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33, Ohio's FY 2024-2025 budget bill, regarding the state publicly funded child care program.

I am a stay-at-home mom to four smart and beautiful girls aging from 16 to 4 years old. My husband is the sole income provider for our family. We unfortunately live in poverty. We struggle to make ends meet quite often. When my second child was 6 weeks old I started my first day of college. I have always dreamed of working in the medical field...maybe become a doctor and open a small-town practice. I attended college part-time until my youngest was around 18 months old. At that time, I was not in a good position. I was going through a divorce and a single mom of two kids with no job and an incomplete degree. I ended up having to get three jobs just to provide for my children. One job was solely to pay the cost of child care. I didn't have much support other than from my dad, who like me was dealing with grief after just having lost my mom. Ultimately, something in my life had to take a back burner. Sadly, it was my education. I had to work. And when at work I needed child care. It was a cycle.

A year later, I met my husband, Joe. A year and a half later we were married, and he was in the process of formally adopting our two older children. During this time, we both were working, and in order to save money and for me to quit one of my jobs, we would work opposite shifts because of the cost of child care was not affordable for us. During that time, we only saw each other as we passed in and out the door and our children rarely got to see mom and dad together. When I became pregnant with our third child we talked long and hard about how we could make having another child work, financially. We decided that it only made sense for me to become a stay-at-home mom. If I were to have gotten a job, every penny of my paycheck, plus some of his would have to go to child care. When we went to our local Job and Family Services to inquire for childcare vouchers, we were told we didn't qualify—we couldn't afford child care on our own but would make too much to qualify for a voucher if we were both working and were advised that we should just work separate shifts.

A few years later we had our final child. Our warrior. The plan was always that when she turned 3 and went to preschool I would return to school and finish my degree so that we both could provide for our family and finally be free of needing government assistance. But when she was 10 months old, we learned she had a stroke at some point during utero and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. We originally tried to get her into our county Head Start classroom, however, they were unable to provide the services she needed due to staffing shortages. Instead, she attended our county integrated preschool on part-time basis. She was

also in the Early Head Start, home based program and will stay in the program until she goes into kindergarten. Our family is very grateful to Head Start. All my children have benefitted from their programming throughout their lives. All my children have been and will be kindergarten ready. Not only have they helped my children, they also helped me learn how to help my children. Head Start taught me how to teach them. By the time they hit kindergarten, they were reading, they were writing and had basic math down. And with my youngest, they even helped her get diagnosed.

Due to my daughter's cerebral palsy and more recent diagnosis of epilepsy, it requires her to receive a lot of medical care. She attends a specialized therapy program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, the Pearlman Center two days a week and 2.5 hours each day in addition to regularly seeing the 30 doctors and specialists on my daughter's care team. On any given week we are at the hospital 3-4 days a week. I joke that they should give me my own room since we are there so much. Hospital staff have become almost like family. When we are not at the hospital, we are doing therapies at home. The Pearlman Center has taught me how to be a physical therapist, occupational therapist, and a speech therapist.

With my daughters' medical needs and the education of all 4 of my children, we have no choice other than for me to stay at home, always destined to remain in poverty. My husband works as hard as he can and does an amazing job at providing for our family. Even with all his hard work, we still require assistance such as food and especially medical. We have had to learn to live with very little. Our exposure to the world, such as museums and zoos, are only because of Head Start. It doesn't feel like "the American dream". It feels more like "the American struggle".

I am grateful my children are doing well, but we worry constantly about losing our Medicaid coverage and SNAP food benefits. It's so frustrating that all the programs have different income eligibility guidelines. Earning just one dollar over the threshold can get us disqualified. Then we spend months trying to adjust only to be set back into debt and reapplying for assistance again. I wish there was some type of support or step-down process. My husband has turned down overtime and raises to ensure any additional income doesn't leave us worse off financially. My dream is that I would have to worry about which bill to pay and that all I had to think about was getting my daughter to the right appointments.

I have come to terms with being stuck and living like this but am having a hard time coming to terms with my children, or anyone's children, having to live like this...having to decide to give up your career, your chance at getting out of poverty, simply because you cannot afford child care. That doesn't sit well with me when I imagine my girls' future. Families shouldn't have to make that choice.

Thank you for listening to my story and please consider my family and the many families like mine who make these difficult choices every day. I ask you to support families in poverty by supporting a way up and out of it instead of contributing to systems that force us to choose reliance on public benefits. We ask you to act on this during this budget cycle by increasing state investment in infant-toddler child care capacity and preschool and increasing eligibility for child care programs.