



**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Committee
House Bill 33
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Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny, and members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written interested party testimony on Substitute House Bill 33, Ohio's FY 2024-2025 budget bill, regarding infant & toddler child care.

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 serve 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.

Head Start and Early Head Start provide child-centered, family focused, comprehensive community-based services to vulnerable children and families. 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 is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States and provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, dental, mental health, social services and parent engagement opportunities to low-income, special needs and at-risk children and their families, and is preparing Ohio children for success in kindergarten, school and life. Head Start's proven model of comprehensive support for children and families experiencing poverty is foundational to Ohio's Early Care and Education ecosystem.

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

Head Start promotes the school readiness of children from families whose income is less than the Federal Poverty Level. Families and children experiencing homelessness and children in the foster care system are also categorically eligible, and Head Start services are uniquely available to children with disabilities and other special 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 engage parents or other key family members in positive relationships, with a focus on family wellbeing, and parents participate in leadership roles, including having a voice in program operations.

Ohio must invest more in young children strengthens Ohio's workforce today and tomorrow. The lack of investment in Ohio's young children and child care leaves Ohio's young children behind and jeopardizes our future workforce. According to the Ohio Department of Education, only 38% of Ohio kindergartners entering the classroom ready to learn, and only 38% of Ohio students proficient in 8th grade math, workforce readiness is in jeopardy. Given these numbers, it should be no surprise to any of us that most children aren't ready to learn given that only about half of eligible low-income children ages 0-5 under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level able to access any state funded child care, preschool or Head Start.

While we were pleased to see the inclusion of the Department of Children and Youth and the increase in publicly funded child care eligibility included in the Substitute House Bill, we were deeply concerned that the \$150 million in state ARPA funds proposed by Governor DeWine were removed.

These funds would provide child care scholarships for those at critical care occupations. We recommend restoring Governor DeWine's proposed \$150 million in state FY 24 from Fund 5CV3, line item 6006A7. These ARPA funds will (1) establish a child care scholarship for critical occupations and other director services professionals with incomes less than 200 percent of the FPL and (2) increase access to licensed child care programs for infants and toddlers with priority for those in rural and urban areas.

We also urge you to include Representatives White and Humphrey's amendment to invest \$6 million in pilot funding for Early Head Start 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. This amendment also recognizes Head Start and Early Head Start as an alternative pathway to the Step Up to Quality Head Start Programs and contracted family child care partners, reducing administrative burden without sacrificing quality. Head Start Program Performance Standards exceeds the Step Up to Quality's definition of high quality. Creating a practical alternative pathway for Head Start and NAEYC Accredited centers into SUTQ would save money and time by reducing the administrative burden on programs and the state.

For all Ohioans to be able to go back to work and for us to have a future workforce ready and able to work we must make significant investments in infant & toddler child care and increasing proposed funding for preschool.

Ohio 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 submit this testimony. Please reach out to me if you have any questions about the content of this testimony.

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Our organization and partners are pleased to see the inclusion of the Department of Children and Youth and the increase in publicly funded child care eligibility in the Substitute House Bill. However, given the extreme workforce crisis the child care industry is facing, we are pleading with this Committee to restore the \$150 million in state ARPA funds proposed by Governor DeWine for child care scholarships and increasing access to licensed child care programs for infants and toddlers, as well as invest new general revenue funds to increase child care and preschool capacity in local communities with the greatest need. Ohioans cannot go back to work without access to child care and the child care workforce cannot be left out of this budget