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PROPOSED BUDGET LEAVES OHIO'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN BEHIND

\$244 million cut could eliminate early care and education services for 131,000 children

Columbus, OH- The Ohio Senate received the House version of the 2010-2011 Budget last week with over \$244 million dollars in cuts to the early care and education system from the previous biennium. Programs cut include Early Childhood Education (Public Preschool), the Early Learning Initiative, Child Care, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, and Help Me Grow, Ohio's home visitation program for vulnerable infants, toddlers, and their families. An estimated 131,000 children could lose access to these programs.

With over \$270 million in new state investments in the development of a high-quality early childhood system in the last biennium, the proposed cuts show a stunning reversal of commitment. High-quality early education programs such as the Early Learning Initiative and Public Preschool received unprecedented support by the Governor and the legislature two years ago, with a 29.5 percent increase in public preschool funding. This time around, those programs have been slashed by \$119 million, serving 8,800 less kids per year.

This is in stark contrast to the declarations made by the Governor and the legislature during the last two years stating the early childhood is one of the most important investments Ohio can make. In his budget summary two year ago, then Speaker of the House Jon Husted agreed, writing that "Preschool is an essential time in the life and development of young child... a time when children gain the fundamentals to succeed in life and beyond."

The Senate also supported this big push two years ago, adding additional funding for early childhood behavioral health treatment and supporting the increases in other areas. Comments on the Senate floor during the budget deliberation included statements that argued that "one of the best returns we will see on the taxpayer's money over the next two years is on early care and education."

Long-term research studies, such as the 40-plus year Perry Preschool Study out of Michigan, support these statements, showing that early care and education is one of smartest investments a state can make, with a return on investment of \$7-\$17 for every dollar invested. "Children who have participated in these studies have shown less need for special education and grade retention, have higher standardized test scores from pre-school through high-school, and have median incomes as adults much greater than their peers who did not participate in high-quality early care and education." said Katie Kelly, director of Groundwork.

In 2009, 33 state legislatures increased funding for early education in the face of declining revenues and rising deficits. “These states increased funding for early care and education to provide immediate support to working families, build the long-term human capital and workforce competitiveness of their states, and give more children a better chance to succeed in school, in life, and in the global economy,” said Kelly. These states included Oklahoma, now serving 70 percent of their four-year-olds in their pre-k program, Illinois who is now phasing in universal access to pre-k for all three and four year olds, and West Virginia, currently serving 46 percent of four-year-olds in their pre-k program, and phasing in universal access by 2013. In comparison, Ohio is serving approximately 6 percent of our three-and-four year olds in our Early Childhood Education and Early Learning Initiative Programs combined.

“During tough economic times, we need to invest in programs that are proven to work. Other states are building high-quality early care and education systems to provide the best foundation possible for their education systems and for their economies. Ohio must continue its investments in early childhood or we will be left behind,” said Kelly.

groundWork is a coalition early care and education leaders, parents, service professionals, business leaders, and organizations across the state who have come together to promote state investments and policies that will address the needs of Ohio’s youngest children, including voluntary access to high-quality early care and education programs, assessment, screening, and treatment for social and emotional problems, increased access to health services and supports, and voluntary access to full-day kindergarten.

To learn more about groundWork, please visit www.groundworkohio.org.

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