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HOUSE CUTS EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FUNDING BY \$23 MILLION

Ohio's youngest children lose access to vital programs including public preschool and mental health treatment.

The Ohio House released the Substitute Bill Tuesday with damaging changes to Ohio's early childhood system including a \$23 million cut to Early Childhood Education (public preschool) in an effort to restore cuts made to the reimbursement rate for child care providers in the Executive Budget. This reduction would decrease the number of children served per year in the state's public preschool program by 2,100. The House also supported the Governor's cut to the Early Learning Initiative program, which saw a reduction from 12,000 to 8,000 slots. Currently Ohio is only serving six percent of three- and-four- year olds in these two preschool programs combined.

Also unaddressed in the substitute bill are measures to restore funding to Ohio's Early Childhood Mental Health Treatment and Consultation programs. Funding for these programs serve children birth to six with severe behavioral health disorders. For many children participating in these programs, early treatment can mean the difference between a lifetime of mental illness and crime and a chance to have a normal and healthy life. Cuts to Early Childhood Mental Health will serve approximately 3,200 less children and 805 less families.

Balancing the budget on the backs of our youngest children cannot be the solution to Ohio's budget woes. High-quality early childhood education is the most important investment Ohio can make for our economy and for our future. High-quality early care and education yields research-based results for our educational system, or future workforce, and for Ohio's economy. In this time of economic hardship, we need to put our state's tax dollars into programs that we know will produce results.

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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