



House Finance and Appropriations Committee

Katie Kelly

Groundwork

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Good morning Chairman Sykes, Ranking Member Amstutz, and members of the House Finance and Appropriations Committee. I am Katie Kelly and I am the Director of the Groundwork early care and education initiative.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of the 4,000 plus members of Groundwork statewide- including early childhood professionals, teachers, parents, business leaders, doctors, higher education professionals, and more than 350 organizations committed to building an early care and education system in Ohio that gives all of Ohio's children the tools they need to succeed in school and in life.

We would first like to thank the members of the committee for supporting crucial pieces of the Executive Budget, including maintaining eligibility for child care, Early Childhood Education, and the Early Learning Initiative at 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In many areas of Ohio, full-time child care can cost as much as \$800 per child per month. This is simply not affordable for many Ohio families. Maintaining eligibility at 200 percent of the federal poverty level will continue to provide the support that our working families need to maintain and regain employment and avoid greater financial crises and greater dependence on other social services.

We also thank you for maintaining the level of funding for the Early Learning Initiative recommended in the Executive Budget. The Early Learning Initiative currently serves our most at-risk Ohio children with high quality early care and education including significant support services and parental involvement. The successes of this program in developing better trained staff and integrating the family into the child's overall health and learning environment has produced real improvement in school readiness for these children.

Finally, we thank you for supporting the Executive Budget proposal to provide funding for every district to offer full-day kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten is the necessary link between the quality early childhood system we are building and the 21st century education system we are looking to build.

While we are grateful for your commitment to these priorities, House Substitute Bill 1 does not address or cuts crucial parts of the early childhood system.

Our children have only one chance for high quality early experiences. More than 40 years of research tells us that resources must be aimed at improving the quality of our early care and education system to get the highest return on our investment. Every investment, whether decreasing staff to child ratios, increasing training and education for teachers, or providing subsidies to families must be made an integral part of increasing overall quality for families and children. **That is why we must continue to invest in Early Childhood Education, a high-quality program that is aligned with the K-12 system and delivers quality early education to our preschool-aged children. Groundwork strongly requests that you reinstate funding for Early Childhood Education (otherwise known as Public Preschool) to the Executive budget proposed level of \$34.8 million per year. Groundwork also requests that you ensure that our child care providers are receiving a level of reimbursement for subsidized care that is adequate to provide the quality that will produce results for our children and for our future. We ask that you lower the definition of the full-time rate for child care and Early Learning Initiative providers to 30 hours per week.**

The Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative also supports families and child care teachers through the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Treatment Programs. These programs provide coaching to child care providers and parents, and direct treatment for children with severe behavior challenges and developmental concerns. These programs have shown incredible results in Ohio, working with children during the window of opportunity when their young minds are still forming and their ability to heal is the strongest that it will ever be. While the investment in these programs is small relative to the overall early childhood budget, they are a crucial piece of the system. **Groundwork is requesting an additional \$350,000 per year above the Executive Budget recommendation for the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program, bringing the program to the current funding level of \$2.5 million per year. Groundwork also requests \$2.5 million per year for the Early Childhood Mental Health Treatment Program, which was eliminated in the Executive Budget.**

Chairman Sykes, members of the committee, our final request today is that you consider the research in your final decisions about how Ohio will prioritize our resources during the next two years. We have the research on early care and education: it shows, through many long-term research studies, that compared to children who do not have access to high-quality early experiences, children who experience quality early education are 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 23 percent more likely to attend higher education, 50 percent less likely to become a teen parent, and significantly less likely to participate in criminal activity. These children have been shown to need less special education and grade retention, have higher standardized test scores from preschool 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. In short- the research is overwhelming 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.

That is why 33 state legislatures in FY2009 acted to increase their investments in high-quality early education programs even in the face of declining revenues and rising deficits. They did so to provide immediate financial relief to struggling 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. These states included Oklahoma, now serving 70 percent of their four-year-olds in their preschool 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, just to name a few. And that is in addition to any child care or Head Start programs these states are providing. 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. We cannot afford move backwards in this budget.

These states have put their resources into programs that they know will yield results. If Ohio is to truly build an education system that prepares our children to become our hope for the future, we must build an education system that starts at birth and reaches children during the time when their brains are developing the most rapidly and our resources can have the maximum impact.

I thank you for the ability to testify today, and I would be happy to answer any questions.