

**House Finance and Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee**  
**Stephanie Wright Byrd**  
**United Way Success By 6®**  
**March 19, 2009**

Good morning Chairwoman Brown, Ranking Member Burke, and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee. I am Stephanie Wright Byrd and I am the Executive Director of Success By 6® a United Way initiative in Hamilton County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Success By 6® is an initiative of United Way of Greater Cincinnati and many UW organizations across the country that have identified early childhood as a high priority for improving outcomes for children and communities. Our vision and focus in Hamilton County is to assure that all children in our region are optimally safe, healthy and prepared to succeed in kindergarten. We have implemented several strategies in our local community to improve kindergarten readiness for all children, with a specific focus on children who are at risk for not being prepared. These strategies are intended to increase the quality of early childhood education and expand access to best practice home visitation.

In the last several years, the Ohio legislature has invested in a high-quality, comprehensive early childhood system that provides for the physical, social, educational, and emotional needs of our youngest Ohio children, ages birth to six. Ohio has provided these opportunities in programs such as the Early Learning Initiative, Step Up to Quality, and Help Me Grow, among others. These programs are essential to children having the strongest possible start in school and in life, yet some of them are likely to fall short of their potential with the reductions being proposed in the budget.

Success By 6® was established in 2003 as part of a community wide plan that was developed in Cincinnati following the civil unrest in 2001. Community leaders from the business, education, social service, faith and philanthropic sectors came together to take a critical look at how access to high quality early childhood education can make a difference in the lives of children in the inner city and beyond. Since that time we have made significant local, private investments in improving the trajectory for young children, particularly at-risk children going into Cincinnati Public Schools. We have embarked on a five-year, \$30 million campaign focused on scholarships for teachers, coaching and technical assistance for child care programs, a data system to measure child progress in the years leading up to kindergarten and other strategies aimed at improving the quality early childhood education. We have also invested in the expansion of home visitation for first time mothers with support to help transition their children into quality programs when they leave home visitation. To date, we have secured commitments of almost \$10 million for these services. These dollars are above and beyond the annual United Way campaign funds.

You might ask why the business community and others would invest so much time and money in this issue. The answer is easy. High quality services such as rated child care programs and home visitation make a difference in the lives of children and to the long term success of the community. To achieve and maintain quality and to reach the children who are in jeopardy these programs - child care, preschool, home visitation - all require deeper resources than are currently available from the state. And while Ohio has made great strides in implementing a comprehensive early childhood system, In Greater Cincinnati we are infusing private money into the system at the local level to jumpstart and expand the services that will result in improved kindergarten readiness. Research shows that the payoff is significant when we make these investments early, because when children enter school ready to learn, they are 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school and obtain secure employment.<sup>1</sup>

Locally, we are beginning to see movement in the right direction. The number of quality rated centers has increased from 33 in April 2007 to 55 as of January this year. There are positive trends in the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Literacy (KRA-L), where the average score has steadily increased from 17.2 in 2006/2007 to 18 in the current school year. This positive trend carries over to the KRA-L Performance bands, where we've seen the number of children in the lowest band – those needing intensive instruction - move 32.9% in 2006/2007 to 29.8% in the current school year. These are small, gradual changes, but ones that only can be sustained with the state's continued emphasis on high quality programs such as ELI, SUTQ and best practice home visitation.

High quality programs that are designed for our youngest children promote positive growth in their development, ability to learn, capacity to regulate emotions, behavior, and ability to form healthy relationships. They also help to identify when a child is struggling in one or more of these areas early on. When detected early, treatable conditions – such as speech and language delays, aggressive behavior, and separation anxiety – are able to be treated and significantly reduced, thus preparing the child for success in the kindergarten classroom and beyond.

The good news is that there is increasing public will around the topic of kindergarten readiness and high quality early childhood education, despite the fact that there are many difficult issues we face as a state and as a country. Success By 6<sup>®</sup> tested this notion in October 2008, through the UC Institute of Policy Research's Greater Cincinnati Survey where we randomly polled more than 1,500 residents of Greater Cincinnati. In the survey we found that 87% of respondents believe that kindergarten readiness and early childhood education is important or very important (15.4 and 71.9%, respectively) to the long term economic success of our region. Similarly, 90% believe high quality early childhood education is important or very important (15% and 75%, respectively) for improving outcomes for children. Most noteworthy is the response to the statement "I am willing to pay higher taxes to support programs that help low income families pay for child care so that parents can work." A majority of residents, 62% agree with this statement, with 24% of them strongly agreeing. We believe this level of understanding and willingness to support early childhood education means the state is headed in the right direction and has substantial community will to maintain and grow high quality programs for our youngest children.

Investing in Ohio's Early Childhood System benefits our children and our communities. In this challenging budget time, it is vital to continue to support our children's early learning needs. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Schweinhart, Lawrence J. (2004). *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

doing so we will prevent more costly interventions later and avoid unnecessary burdens on state dollars. Our local community is rising to the challenge, and we hope the state can continue its commitment to our collective future.

**As a member of the groundWork Advisory Council Success By 6<sup>®</sup> supports:**

*Creation of the Center for Early Childhood Development within ODE to align, coordinate and improve the early childhood system*

*Maintaining current eligibility levels for child care, ELI, and early childhood education at 200% of the FPL.*

*Continuing to promote quality through SUTQ, TEACH and the professional development registry*

*Expanding SUTQ to home-based child care businesses*

*Including expansion of full-day kindergarten in the K-12 reform and financing solution and allow full-day kindergarten classrooms to be delivered in high quality community-based child care settings.*

**Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.**