



House Human Services Subcommittee

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Good morning Chairwoman Brown, ranking member Burke and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee of the Finance and Appropriations Committee. My name is Laurie Dinnebeil and I am an Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research in the Judith Herb College of Education at the University of Toledo. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The University of Toledo is a comprehensive research institution that serves approximately 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students across Ohio and around the world. The Judith Herb College of Education offers a range of degree programs that prepare individuals for careers as teachers and other educational leaders, including early care and education professionals. I am here to speak to you today as an advocate for high quality early care and education experiences. We are also part of the groundWork coalition.

I would like to start out by saying that we appreciate the challenges that you face in this budget, and we are very grateful for the commitment of the Governor and the General Assembly to providing support for Ohio's early childhood system. In this challenging budget environment, we know that is very important to continue building the system of quality early care and education in Ohio. Ohio's early childhood education programs serve tens of thousands of Ohio's children, support parents' participation in our economy and prepare our children to enter school ready to learn. In a time of economic hardship, these programs are part of the backbone of supporting our current workforce while preparing our children for the workforce of tomorrow.

We are very supportive of the creation of the Center for Early Childhood Development is critical in Ohio's effort to maintain a vital early childhood program while also improving quality and efficiency. Support for the Center for Early Childhood Development will allow for system efficiencies and better use of existing funding. Additionally, the Center will bring together the

work of the School Readiness Solutions Group and the Early Childhood Cabinet and position the entire system to grow and improve as Ohio's economy recovers.

I am proud to be a citizen of a state that recognizes the importance of high quality early care and education experiences and makes investments to support that quality. Scientists have provided solid evidence that high quality early care and education experiences result in positive developmental and academic outcomes for young children. It is important to remember that 85% of a child's brain is developed by the time that child reaches his or her 5th birthday. Young children who have access to high quality early care and education programs are better prepared for kindergarten and the primary grades. This is important because, according to the Ohio Department of Education, nearly one-third of the 130,000 children entering kindergarten each year are not prepared to succeed. In fact, in 2006, nearly 8,000 children in kindergarten and through third grade were held back a grade, costing Ohio taxpayers \$43 million in basic aid funds alone.

Young children enrolled in high quality early care and education programs are less likely to be retained, less likely to need special education services and less likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system. These three factors alone reflect significant economic benefits to the State of Ohio. In addition, young children who have high quality early learning experiences are more likely to be productive citizens who have jobs and pay taxes. It is clear that continuing our state's investment in early care and education programs is a smart move that will pay off with significant benefits.

Key to this discussion, though, is a qualifier. In order to make this investment work, we must ensure that Ohio's youngest citizens have access to *high-quality* early education programs. Several factors contribute to high quality early care and education programs, including: (a) the education level of the teacher, (b) the adult/child ratio, (c) the total class size and d) age-appropriate research-based curriculum. All of these factors are impacted by funds available to support programs. We must continue to fund programs that provide high quality experiences to young children, experiences that will support their developmental and academic success and experiences that will provide our state with the significant return on investment that research shows is possible.

What can you do to make sure that Ohio continues its investment in quality early childhood programs? First, you can continue to support the *Step Up to Quality* initiative. *Step Up to Quality* is Ohio's quality rating system for child care centers. It recognizes and promotes early care and education programs that meet quality benchmarks over and above minimum health and safety licensing standards for Ohio's child care community. It recognizes the importance of a developmentally appropriate learning curriculum, appropriate class sizes and adult/child ratios. In 2008, nearly 45,000 children were served in 455 star-rated centers across Ohio. In 2009, *Step Up to Quality* is on target to reach the goal of 800 star-rated centers that will further increase young children's access to high quality learning opportunities. This program not only moves our child care centers towards quality, but also provides parents with a tool to choose the best option for their young children.

In addition to supporting Step Up to Quality, I urge you to continue providing support to efforts that seek to increase early childhood teachers' continuing education and professional

development. Ohio's *Teacher Education and Compensation Helps* (TEACH) program supports existing early childhood teachers in earning a credential or degree in early childhood education through a scholarship program. Teachers who have TEACH scholarships attend post-secondary education to increase their knowledge and understanding of early childhood education. An important provision of TEACH is that scholarship recipients continue to work in an early childhood program, thereby reducing the frequent staff turnover that erodes the quality of the adult-child relationship and the child's learning experience.

I also urge you to continue to support the programs that coordinate Ohio's *Professional Development Registry*. The Registry is a common tool that allows professionals in the early childhood field to document and quantify their professional growth and accomplishments. It also serves as a quality control mechanism to insure that Ohio's early childhood teachers have meaningful professional development experiences. Supporting the Registry helps us to define and advance the early childhood education profession and it also allows Ohio to have current information regarding characteristics of the early childhood workforce. This is important because such data is critical to accessing both private and federal resources that can complement our investment in young children.

Finally, I urge you to maintain eligibility for child care at 200 percent of the federal poverty level, allowing working families to stay in the workforce and maintaining alignment of child care with the Early Learning Initiative and the Early Childhood Education program.

In summary, I ask you to continue funding that supports young children's brain development through investments in high quality early learning programs. The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland found that for every \$1 invested in high-quality preschool programs, in Ohio, \$1.62 would be returned to the public. I think you will agree with me that this is an investment that we cannot afford not to make. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.