



House Finance and Appropriations Committee

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Groundwork

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Good morning Chairman Sykes, 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.

Many of you have met with members of Groundwork during the past few months to talk about the importance of early care and education to our state. Some of you have even visited an early childhood center and have seen the wonderful work of the early childhood providers in your district.

You have heard about the decades of research showing that high-quality early care and education can change the course of these children's lives far beyond the preschool classroom, making them 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. Through many long-term research studies 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. Today I want to talk to you about our progress towards a genuine system early childhood system, that links all of our programs for young children and gives them the quality they need to make the greatest impact.

To get those kinds of results research tells us that children need a safe environment that provides positive and consistent interactions with their caregivers, enriching learning opportunities, and adequate health care and nutrition. We believe that parents are the first

and most important resource to provide this environment. That is why we support Ohio's investments in programs like Help Me Grow and the Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative, that work with parents and other early childhood professionals to provide the tools they need to give our youngest children the best possible start in life.

Help Me Grow serves as the first point of contact to Ohio's early childhood system, serving 36,000 at-risk children ages birth to three in Fiscal Year 2008 through home visitation. These families have significant hurdles to overcome, and Help Me Grow offers an opportunity to provide information, support, and connection to crucial health and developmental services. **That is why Groundwork strongly supports the Executive budget proposal to fund Help Me Grow services for these at-risk children at \$36.5 million per year. We also support the recommendation to standardize the program statewide to improve the way we deliver these services and serve those families who research shows we can impact the most.** This change will allow Ohio to draw down Medicaid funds for these at-risk home visits, maximizing our state resources and serving additional children.

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. You will hear from my colleague Sherry Shamblin today on the amazing impact that these programs have on the lives of these young children, working with them 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 \$700,000 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 \$5 million over the biennium for the Early Childhood Mental Health Treatment Program, which was eliminated in the Executive Budget.**

While these programs provide critical tools and information for parents, we know that 62 percent of households in Ohio with children ages birth to five have all available parents in the workforce. These parents are the engine of Ohio's economic recovery. The child care, Early Learning Initiative, and Early Childhood Education programs provide the support that working families need to maintain stable employment and provide safe and stable care for their children. We have two of those parents here to speak to you about how Ohio's investments in our child care system are improving the lives of their families everyday. **Groundwork supports the Executive Budget recommendations to maintain eligibility for child care, the Early Learning Initiative and the Early Childhood Education programs at 200 percent of poverty, fund 8,000 children in the Early Learning Initiative, 6,400 children in the Early Childhood Education program, and more than 100,000 children in our child care system.**

The quality of the early care and education system that we provide for these children will greatly impact their ability to succeed in the K-12 system, move on to higher education, and

become successful adults. All of the results that I spoke about earlier come from programs that are staffed with teachers trained in early childhood development and who are receiving adequate compensation, classrooms with low teacher-student ratios, and curricula that is research-based and takes into account the unique needs and learning style of young children. This is where we know we need to go with all of our programs, and in the last biennial budget the investments made by Governor Strickland and the legislature began the work of building a genuine high-quality early care and education *system*. The additional \$270 million in investments in the current biennial budget have allowed Ohio to increase access and improve the quality of our early care and education system through programs such as Step Up to Quality, our quality-rating system that has now rated more than 700 child care centers statewide.

But there is much work to done. To build the kind of system that has the level of quality needed to achieve the best results for our children and for our future, we need to not only coordinate but better integrate the way we are delivering these programs. **The Executive Budget proposal to create a new Center for Early Childhood Development within the Department of Education will allow that system-building to occur in a way that raises the level of quality in all of our early childhood programs while also linking that work to the K-12 and higher education systems.** This is an opportunity twenty years in the making- an opportunity that will maximize not only the investments in early childhood but every dollar that Ohio puts towards education.

Groundwork also supports providing every child in Ohio with access to full-day kindergarten as the necessary link between the quality early childhood system that we are building and the 21st century K-12 system. Simply put- full-day kindergarten expands the learning opportunities for children and allows teachers to give more individualized attention to students who are at risk of falling behind. It also has been shown to significantly reduce grade retention, improve test scores, and impact early literacy skills. As a state, we cannot afford to not fund full-day kindergarten for every child in Ohio if we are serious about making our education system competitive in a global economy.

James Baldwin, one of America's most famous authors, wrote "For these are all our children...We will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."

We know that all of Ohio's citizens will profit from a high-quality early care and education system, both now and for generations to come. We ask that you build on your investments in our early childhood system to support working families and give our youngest children every chance to succeed.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.