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**Ohio House
Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee Committee
House Bill 166
Brigadier General (Ret.) Charles O. Dillard
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Good Afternoon, Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West and members of the committee. I am Brigadier General Charles O. Dillard, a member of Ohio's Council for a Strong America's Mission: Readiness team. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and provide interested party testimony on House Bill 166, the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Operating Budget.

As you may know, Mission: Readiness is a group of 750 retired admirals, generals, and other top military leaders who recognize that the strength of our country depends on a strong military. Since 2009, we have championed evidence-based, bipartisan state and federal public policy solutions that are proven to prepare our youth to be citizen-ready and able to serve their nation in any way they choose.

As the Ohio legislature debates priorities during the upcoming budget process, a clear concern on both sides of the aisle is our current workforce crisis: In Ohio, only 43% of adults have a degree or credential that prepares them for a job available in Ohio today. When we consider current rates of school readiness, this is no surprise as only 40% of kindergarteners enter the classroom ready to learn. As a retired United States Army General, I too am concerned about the preparedness of our future workforce, especially those who may become the service members of our country's future, if they so choose.

Across the country, 71 percent of young people between the ages of 17 and 24 *do not qualify for military service*—this holds true in Ohio, where 72 percent are unqualified due to problems with obesity, education, drug abuse, or crime.

This is indicative of a larger issue—many of our youngest learners are failing to receive the strong foundation they need to succeed throughout their lives. Ohio has taken steps forward in the past several years to create a quality early learning system that is proven to produce quality outcomes for kids and we are grateful for proposed state investments in critical programs like Ohio's Help Me Grow evidence-based home visiting, which boosts productivity among two generations: helping young parents enter the workforce and preparing their kids for success in school.

But the vast majority of Ohio kids who participate in early learning programs do so through publicly funded child care—a system that relies on state funding to support quality, affordable care for our youngest, most at-risk learners. Currently, Ohio has the second lowest eligibility rate to quality for subsidized child care *in the country*. In addition to utilizing federal dollars to increase quality within our system, it is crucial that our state work to serve more young children by expanding state eligibility to support additional families who could benefit from this critical work support *and* improve outcomes for our youngest, most at-risk kids.

All children deserve quality early childhood education, but our most vulnerable children stand to benefit the most. Clear research on brain development and economics tells us that investing in early childhood education is the smart strategy -- even during difficult budgets. Strategic investments in the early years of a child's development are more than offset by the benefits our state—and country—will see in the long term.