

Prioritize Investments in Child Care in the State Budget

AN OPEN LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE OHIO SENATE

May 16, 2025

Dear Members of the Ohio General Assembly,

Groundwork Ohio and the undersigned organizations thank the House of Representatives for restoring \$100 million of the \$300 million initially removed from Governor DeWine’s proposed budget for Child Care to support working families up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Your action recognizes that affordable, high-quality child care is not only essential for children’s healthy development but also a cornerstone of Ohio’s workforce and economic strength.

Yet urgent gaps remain. We respectfully ask the Senate to make HB 96 a meaningful investment in working families and Ohio’s economies by restoring the remaining support.

We urge the Senate to:

- 1. Reinstate the full \$300 million in TANF funds to Child Care.**
 - Ohio already spends about \$400 million TANF dollars each year on child care^[1]; pulling funds now would cut the overall child care budget, weakening one of our most effective anti-poverty and workforce tools.
- 2. Restore the Governor’s proposal to raise Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) initial eligibility to 160% FPL (continuing eligibility at 300% FPL)**
 - Increasing eligibility would open the door to child care for 11,000 additional children each year to families of three earning up to \$42,6409.
- 3. Protect early literacy and school readiness supports by restoring:**
 - The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), Ohio’s only statewide measure of early learning impact.
 - The Dolly Parton Imagination Library expansion.
 - Requirements to align early learning curricula with the science of reading.

Why Investments in Child Care Matter

- **The workforce behind the workforce is struggling.** Between 2023 and 2024, nearly 1 in 5 early childhood educators left the field^[2] and more than half (58%) of Ohio child care programs report staffing shortages that limit available slots for families^[3].
- **Families are being priced out.** Nearly half of Ohio parents with children under five (49%) say child care is hard to find, and 73% call it “expensive.”^[4]
- **The economy is losing talent.** Forty-four percent of working parents missed work or left early in the past two years because of child-care breakdowns; 49% cut back hours, over one million Ohio workers^[5].
- **Children are arriving at school unprepared.** Nearly four in five low-income children are not demonstrating kindergarten readiness, and 44% of all kindergartners are off track in literacy^[6]. Children who start behind are far less likely to meet third grade reading and math benchmarks, graduate, or earn post-secondary credentials.
- **Ohio voters see the link.** 86% of voters, and 90% of parents, agree that expanding access to high-quality child care- will strengthen the state’s economy^[7].

Expanded Access to Child Care Puts Parents Back to Work

- Restoring the proposal to move initial eligibility for PFCC to 160% of the Federal Poverty Level would not only bring Ohio out of last place among other states, but it would also serve 11,000 more children.
- The Child Care Choice Voucher program serves families earning up to 200% FPL who are working or in training but do not qualify for PFCC. Already supports over 8,000 children (April 2025)^[8] and is projected to reach 29,000 children over the biennium^[9].
- Estimated cost of \$75 million in FY 2026 and \$150 million in FY 2027^[10], a modest investment compared with the \$5.48 billion annual hit Ohio’s economy takes from child care related workforce losses^[11].

The KRA Must Be Restored

- The KRA is Ohio’s only statewide, child level tool that measures how prepared every kindergartner is across four domains: social emotional development, language and literacy, mathematics, and physical wellbeing.
- **Tracks Return on Investment.** Policymakers and taxpayers can see whether public dollars for child care, preschool, and home visiting programs are improving outcomes statewide and in local communities.
 - **Identifies Delays Early.** The KRA highlights gaps among student groups, allowing districts to direct resources before small differences become entrenched achievement gaps.
 - **Predicts Later Success.** Children who enter kindergarten demonstrating readiness are nine times more likely to score proficient or higher on the third-grade Ohio State Test in mathematics and seven times more likely to do so in English Language Arts^[12]. Eliminating the KRA would leave Ohio without a critical early indicator of student progress, making it harder to identify learning gaps and invest in the supports that children need most.

The Bottom Line

- Investing in child care today prevents more costly academic remediation and workforce shortages tomorrow. Ohioans have spoken, loudly and clearly:
- **Parents want to work.**
 - **Early Childhood Professionals need support**
 - **Businesses need reliable employees.**
 - **Children deserve a fair start.**

Completing Governor DeWine’s vision for child care, and preserving the tools that gauge its impact, will pay dividends for decades.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering these vital restorations. We stand ready to partner with you to ensure every Ohio child, and every Ohio parent, can contribute fully to our state’s prosperity.



[1] Administration for Children & Families, [TANF Financial Data FY 2023](#).

[2] Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. State fiscal year 2024 summary: July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024. (2024)

[3] National Association for the Education of Young Children. [Ohio: Early childhood educator workforce state highlights](#). (2024)

[4] Groundwork Ohio (2025). [2024 Child Care Poll](#).

[5] Groundwork Ohio (2025). [2024 Child Care Poll](#).

[6] Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, School Report Card data (2022-2023 school year)

[[7] Groundwork Ohio (2025). [2024 Child Care Poll](#).

[8] Ohio Department of Children and Youth (2025)

[9] Ohio Legislative Service Commission. (2025). [Redbook: Department of Children and Youth](#)

[10] Ohio Legislative Service Commission. (2025). [Redbook: Department of Children and Youth](#)

[11] The US. Chamber Foundation (2025). [UNTAPPED POTENTIAL IN OHIO](#)

[12] Ohio Department of Children and Youth. (2024). [Impact Brief](#).