

Garrett Thompson

Family Action Network Parent Advocate

May 13, 2025

Ohio Senate Health Committee Chairperson Huffman, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

My name is Garrett Thompson, and I am a parent from Miami County. I am here today to urge you to restore the Governor's budget proposal, which included critical investments in child care, maternal and infant health, and early learning.

I am a single father and a proud Parent Ambassador representing the Council on Rural Services Program. My son has been involved in Head Start since he was just 6 weeks old. From day one, Head Start has supported both of us—not only helping my son set goals for his development, but also helping me grow into the best single dad I can be.

They welcomed me into the classroom to spend time with my son and see how the teachers interacted with him. The staff worked alongside me to set goals for his learning and development while also helping me identify personal goals for our family. When we needed health and wellness support, the program was there.

Through this journey, I became more involved—attending parent meetings and eventually being elected to Policy Council. I'm incredibly grateful that my son had access to high-quality early learning experiences. Now that he's 9, I still carry those lessons with me.

However, I continue to face challenges, like finding third-shift child care. Families like mine need more support to bridge the gaps between early learning and school-age care—especially for working parents. Programs like Head Start are life-changing, and we need more resources like this to lift up families in every stage of the journey.

Groundwork Ohio has outlined key priorities that will strengthen our state's early childhood system, including:

- **Child Care Crisis:** RESTORE publicly funded child care eligibility to 160% of FPL and RESTORE the Child Care Choice Voucher program to \$75M in FY26 and \$150M in FY27.
- **Economic Stability:** RESTORE the proposed refundable Child Tax Credit of up to \$1,000 per child under age 7.
- **Home Visiting:** RESTORE \$22.5 million in proposed investment in this evidence-based programming.

- Infant & Maternal Mortality: RESTORE the originally proposed infant vitality funds to \$7.5M each fiscal year.
- Medicaid Access for Moms and Babies: RESTORE existing law requiring multi-year continuous Medicaid enrollment for babies ages 0-3 championed by House leaders last budget cycle. STOP restrictions on the use of doula services to Medicaid eligible women.
- Lead Poisoning: RESTORE funding for the Lead Safe Home and Lead Abatement programs within the Ohio Department of Health.
- Tobacco Use: RESTORE funding for prevention programming.
- Early Learning & Literacy: RESTORE requirements to integrate the science of reading in early learning; RESTORE additional funding for the Governor's 3 Imagination Library; RESTORE the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment—the only tool the state has to understand the impact of early childhood experiences for every child.

These investments will not only help children thrive but also boost Ohio's workforce and economy. I urge you to fully fund these initiatives to ensure every child gets the best start in life. Thank you for your time and commitment to Ohio's children and families. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Garrett Thompson