

## **Introduction: Why Testify?**

Testifying before the Ohio legislature is a powerful way to share your voice and advocate for policies that support young children and families. Legislators rely on personal stories and expert insights to shape budget decisions. Your testimony can help secure funding for early learning, child care, maternal and infant health, and family support programs.

## **What to Expect in the Budget Process**

1. **Standing Committee Hearings** - The House and Senate each have standing committees of jurisdiction that hear budget testimony related to specific state agencies and programming. Many of these committees offer opportunities for public testimony related to the state budget and other legislation.
  - In the House, many children's issues and programming will be heard in the Committees on Children & Human Services, Health, Education & Workforce, and Medicaid.
  - In the Senate, children's issues are likely to be heard in Education and Health.
  - Tax issues that impact children and families, such as the Child Tax Credit introduced in Governor DeWine's budget, may be heard in Ways & Means Committee.
2. **Finance Committee Hearings** - Each chamber also hosts a finance committee that is tasked with hearing the budget in its entirety and whose members can offer amendments to the budget bill. There are fewer opportunities to offer public testimony to this larger committee. Its members may not mirror the standing committee of jurisdiction related to children's issues.
3. **Public Testimony Opportunities** - There are designated times when the public can present written and/or oral testimony to influence funding decisions. These are noted separately from state agency testimony hearings and the Groundwork team will alert our network when these opportunities are announced in both the House and the Senate.
4. **Conference Committee** - The leadership from both parties in each chamber will appoint "conferees" to iron out differences in their version of the budget bill. This committee will meet in June and also work closely with the Governor's office to negotiate a final budget bill. Public testimony opportunities at this point in the process are slim.

## Tips for Writing and Delivering Testimony

### Writing Effective Testimony

- **Be Clear and Concise** - Aim for one or two pages. Testimony should take no more than 3 minutes to deliver aloud when you practice in advance.
- **Start with a Strong Opening** - Introduce yourself, your connection to the issue, and why you care.
- **State Your Ask** - Clearly state what you are asking the legislators to fund or do. Feel free to copy and paste the from Groundwork Ohio's Key Budget Priorities.
- **Tell a Personal Story** - Share real-life experiences to illustrate the impact of investments in early childhood.
- **Use Data** - Support your argument with facts, such as how increasing child care access improves workforce participation.
- **End with a Call to Action and Gratitude** - Urge legislators to prioritize funding for young children and families. Thank the committee for their time and consideration.

### Delivering Oral Testimony

- **Prepare in Advance** - Practice reading your testimony aloud.
- **Keep It Under 3 Minutes** - Most committees allow only a few minutes per speaker.
- **Stay Professional and Respectful** - Legislators appreciate constructive advocacy.
- **Engage with Legislators** - Make eye contact and be open to follow-up questions.
- **Print extra copies** - Be sure you have a printed copy for yourself as well as a few additional copies. Legislators will be following along on their iPads and your submission will be published on the committee website, but you never know whether a staffer or fellow stakeholder might like a copy of your remarks that day.
- **Anticipate Questions** - Legislators are offered the opportunity to ask questions of all witnesses. Direct your response "through the Chair, to the Representative / Legislator." If you do not know the answer, offer to follow up with the Chair's staff after the meeting, who will circulate your response to the full committee.

## Testimony Template

[Your Name]  
[Your Organization]

[Date]

Ohio House/Senate [BLANK] Committee

Chairperson [Last Name], Vice Chair [Last Name], Ranking Member [Last Name], and Members of the [House/Senate] Finance Committee:

My name is [Your Name], and I am a [your role—parent, early childhood professional, business leader, etc.] from [Your City]. I am here today to urge you to prioritize critical investments in early childhood programs in Ohio’s FY2026-27 state budget, House Bill 96.

As someone who [shares a brief personal experience—e.g., struggled to find affordable child care, benefited from early intervention services], I know firsthand how important it is to support young children and working families.

Groundwork Ohio has outlined key priorities that will strengthen our state’s early childhood system, including [feel free to choose one of these investment areas below to highlight]:

### **1. Make work pay for working families with young children.**

- Increase access to affordable, quality child care for working families to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Implement a refundable child tax credit **for working parents with** young children.

### **2. Improve health outcomes for moms and babies.**

- Increase access to evidence-based home visiting programs including expanding the Family Connects model statewide.
- Invest and scale community impact models like Cradle Cincinnati to encourage collaboration between women, clinicians, hospitals, managed care and other community partners to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

### **3. Support quality early learning experiences that prepare children for Kindergarten.**

- Invest in effective early childhood educators to meet the growing needs of young children by improving payment practices to child care programs.
- Strengthen Early Development and Literacy Support: Increase state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, while also expanding access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives, including curricula grounded in the science of reading and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio.

These policies 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,

[Your Name]

## Additional Resources

- **Find Your Legislators:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/>
- **Committee Schedules:** Senate ([Senate Committees | Ohio Legislature](#)) and House ([House Committees | Ohio Legislature](#))
- **Groundwork Ohio Policy Priorities:** [https://www.groundworkohio.org/files/ugd/a395ee\\_6425313d675f4a42a08648be72c850af.pdf](https://www.groundworkohio.org/files/ugd/a395ee_6425313d675f4a42a08648be72c850af.pdf)