learning grove

333 Madison Ave.
Covington KY 41011

P 859.431.2075
F 859.431.3134

learning-grove.org

Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Written Testimony on House Bill 110

Patricia Gleason, COO, Learning Grove
March 4, 2021

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and members of the subcommittee, my name is Patricia Gleason and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Learning Grove. We are grateful to be able to provide written testimony on HB 110, Ohio's FY 2022-23 budget bill specifically as it relates to the publicly funded child care program administered by the Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS) which has invited testimony.

Learning Grove is a key provider of child care and early learning programs in Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky. It is the merger of two of the most respected child care providers in both our states. Cincinnati Early Learning Centers and Children, Inc. were both well known for delivering an outstanding level of early education. Thirteen months ago these two highly acclaimed organizations joined efforts, combining strengths under a new name: Learning Grove.

We serve a racially and socioeconomically diverse population of nearly 7,000 children, youth, and families annually with programs across our region. Our partnership allowed our organization to move further faster and combine resources to support youth, parents, and educators more effectively. It increased our ability to nurture lifelong successes for children and students, families, professionals, and the community.

We believe all children deserve to be nurtured through high-quality education, to think critically, get along with others, and set the path toward a productive future. To help realize these experiences, we never compromise on practices and programs that are best for children. Extraordinarily dedicated women and men innovate and advocate for our children, parents, and community. We provide the highest quality education for each child and work to support their parents and caregivers. Together we transform lives and help build brighter futures. Together we strive for lifelong success.

Learning Grove is a member and supporter of Groundwork Ohio. Groundwork has submitted detailed testimony and we write to support their recommendations. We see every day the toll that an underfunded child care system takes on working parents struggling to make ends meet, on businesses who can't recruit and retain employees who don't have child care, and on child care workers whose salaries are so low that they qualify for a child care subsidy for their own children.

United Way of Greater Cincinnati AGENCY PARTNER

In order for Ohio to make sure parents have child care, that employers can retain workers and that our youngest children are ready to succeed in school and life the state must make substantial changes in how it supports early education.

- Ohio's publicly funded child care program is only available to individuals earning under 130% of the Federal Poverty Level. This puts Ohio far behind other states who have increased eligibility for subsidy because they recognize that low subsidy rates are a disincentive to work. Ohio's low eligibility means that a mother with two young children can earn no more than $13.57 per hour or $28,236 annually to access a subsidy. To advance in a career or come closer to self-sustaining work can leave a parent with *less* expendable income when they lose their child care subsidy. Moving forward in your job should not put your family further behind. Ohio should follow other states and **increase initial eligibility to 200% FPL beginning with an increase to 150% FPL in FY2022**.

- In order to remain in compliance with our federal child care grant, **base rates for publicly funded providers must be increased to at least the 25th percentile of the market rate** in Ohio. The federal government recommends that states fund at the 75th percentile of market rate so that low-income children benefitting from the subsidy have access to 75% of the child care market, an access that is denied by our low market rate. Ohio is hitting only the minimum required level by using federal funds rather than increasing the state funds to provide the ongoing foundational support that child care needs.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has left families in crisis. Lack of affordable, quality child care has impacted poor and middle-class working families, with large numbers of women leaving the workforce because they are faced with a choice between low quality care or spending an unsustainable portion of their income on child care. Businesses are confronting unprecedented child care challenges as employees lose access to trusted, safe learning environments. Lack of affordable child care decreases employee productivity, morale, job quality and tenure.

- Our state is also facing the crisis of our children not being prepared to succeed in school. Prior to the pandemic only 41% of our children came to kindergarten ready to learn and the numbers will be worse after the learning loss from the crisis. We have the child care system we need in Ohio, where 100% of our centers are participating in the Step Up to Quality rating system and nearly half are highly rated (3, 4 or 5 stars). Now we have to provide stable state funding to support the quality we have developed and make it accessible to the families who need it.

Please **increase child care subsidy eligibility to 150% FPL** and invest state dollars to **increase base rates above the minimum federal required 25th percentile**.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please reach out to me directly if you have questions about our testimony or Ohio's child care system.

Sincerely,
Patti

Patricia Gleason

Patricia Gleason
COO, Learning Grove
pgleason@learning-grove.org

United Way of Greater Cincinnati AGENCY PARTNER