



CUYAHOGA COUNTY
Office of Early Childhood/
Invest in Children



**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
Sub House Bill 110**

**Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood – Invest in Children
May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, my name is John Ladd and I am a Program Officer with Cuyahoga County's Office of Early Childhood, and Invest in Children. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here and share how important proposed revisions to Sub HB-110 are to the families and young children of both Ohio and Cuyahoga County.

Invest in Children is keenly interested in HB-110 due to our work as Cuyahoga County's public/private partnership that mobilizes resources and research to ensure the well-being of all young children in Cuyahoga County. As an early childhood system, we urge you to carefully consider the needs of families with young children in the important budget decisions now being made. Specifically, we encourage you to:

- Keep Ohio working by helping parents afford childcare and ensuring more children in low-income families have access to high-quality care by expanding initial eligibility for publicly funded childcare from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 150% FPL, as is contained in Amendment SC2363.
- Recognize and support the significant increase in operating costs the Covid-19 pandemic has caused Ohio's early childhood providers and assist in the recovery of lost capacity by ensuring the sustainable funding throughout the FY22-23 budget.

For over 20 years, Cuyahoga County and the state of Ohio have made significant investments in our early childhood system. Our significant investment of local levy dollars builds upon the state investments to work in partnership and produce better outcomes for young children and families. Our most visible example of this is our Universal Pre-Kindergarten program (UPK) which only includes providers deemed high quality in the state's Step Up To Quality rating system. The SUTQ system has been the crucial foundation upon which UPK was built, and now serves over 4000 children per year. Outside evaluation of our program has been an important part of how we know we are making a difference. Our most recent evaluation showed that children who spent at least 18 months in our program, were 2.5 times more likely to be ready for Kindergarten than children who were in the matched comparison group of preschools. Most

importantly, we saw that the children who made the strongest gains, were those who had the most needs. The social and economic return on investment of high-quality preschool for disadvantaged kids is clear.

Ohio currently ranks near the very bottom among states in its publicly funded childcare eligibility level. We note that while it is helpful that the current budget proposal works to raise eligibility for publicly funded childcare to 138 percent of FPL, it falls short of meeting the significant need we see in working lower-income families who are still trying to recover from the disruption the pandemic has caused in their lives and employment. Supporting amendment SC2363 to raise the income threshold to 150 percent of the FPL is a welcomed increase and positive step towards meeting this important need for many hard-working Ohio families in our community seeking to give their children the best start in life.