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Dear Chairwoman White, Co-Chair Cirino, and members of the Study Committee on Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care and Step Up to Quality Program:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written recommendations to the Committee. Groundwork Ohio and many of our partners have been grateful for the opportunity to learn alongside the Committee and explore solutions to Ohio's quality child care challenges. We appreciate your time and sincerity in this effort.

There are many levers for improving Ohio's child care system, but like building a house, we must first ensure the foundation is solid. Given the historic lack of investment in this critical system, recommendations that strengthen the foundation all require new investment in addition to the maintenance of current investments. This means **the state must consistently, and over a significant period, invest to fund the actual costs of a quality child care system through increasing the percentage of General Revenue Funds dedicated to child care.** We acknowledge that not all necessary improvements to Ohio's child care system can occur at once but doing so over a series of budgets is possible. With these investments in child care, Ohio's economy will thrive.

We've identified the most urgent improvements needed to Ohio's child care system and we ask the committee to recommend the state begin here¹:

- (1) **Increase eligibility for Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.** The average cost of center-based care in 2019 was \$11,504 for infants and \$9,039 for 4-year olds. Ohio is the third worst state in the nation when comparing household income eligibility as a percentage of state median income. We're one of only 18 states that sets their limit under 50% of the state median income.
- (2) **Require reimbursement practices to align funding to the actual cost of quality care and direct dollars to the workforce.** States leading in providing quality care meet the providers' true cost of care. True costs of quality care include adequate pay for highly qualified teachers, appropriate staff/child ratios, continuous professional learning, resources for planning, developmentally appropriate child assessments and family engagement.
- (3) **Incentivize quality care and early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers.** Among all ages served by Ohio's system, infants and toddlers are the least likely to be served and capacity for serving Ohio's infants and toddlers has decreased over the course of the pandemic. The monthly reimbursement rate for infants based on the 2018 market rate survey was only \$910 where the estimated cost of high-quality care was \$2,031, leaving a \$1,121 per child delta for providers to absorb and resulting in disparate options in care for this critical age group.

As you've listened to countless testimony this year, these are among the most common messages you heard:

- Access to quality child care and early learning is critical for families, the workforce and the healthy development of young children.
- The foundation of Ohio's child care system is in dire trouble.
- The system challenges are not unsolvable, but they are substantial because they have been neglected for so long.
- All solutions to improve the foundation of Ohio's child care system require increased investment.

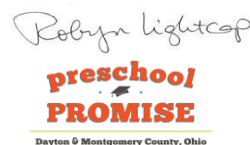
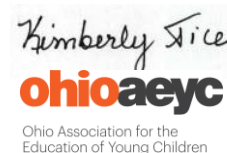
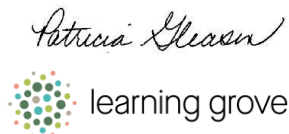
We urge you to provide recommendations that will set the course for Ohio to implement a thriving child care system. It is critical you resist making recommendations that would lower the quality of child care in Ohio as choosing to invest in low-quality care will undermine our current and future workforce *and* will *not* cost the state less. We ask that you recommend increasing funds to support the child care system. **Any cut to funding of the child care system will exacerbate an already dire situation and lead to the system's ultimate collapse.**

We must prioritize the workforce of tomorrow *today*. The system's challenges are solvable, and our broad and diverse network of early learning stakeholders stand ready to support this Committee and the state of Ohio in advancing quality care for Ohio's youngest children. **Please take this opportunity to make bold recommendations that will set the course for our state to maintain a strong workforce and advance a prosperous economy.**

Warm personal regards,



Shannon Jones
President & CEO



ⁱ Note: All data references in this letter are drawn from the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, [Ohio State Policy Roadmap](#).