House Finance and Appropriations Health and Human Services Subcommittee
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Groundwork
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Good morning Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Goyal and members of the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Katie Kelly and I am the Director of the Groundwork early care and education initiative, and a Fellow at The Center for Community Solutions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of the 6,000 plus members of Groundwork statewide—including early childhood professionals, teachers, parents, business leaders, doctors, higher education professionals, and more than 350 organizations committed to building an early care and education system in Ohio that gives all of Ohio’s children the tools they need to succeed in school and in life. Groundwork does not directly represent early childhood providers, but instead is looking to increase the availability of quality, research-based early childhood opportunities for Ohio’s youngest children. We advance programs with proven outcomes that show a significant return on investment.

Many of you have met with members of Groundwork during the past few months to talk about the importance of early care and education to our state. Some of you have even visited an early childhood center and have seen the wonderful work of the early childhood providers in your district.

You have heard about the decades of research showing that high-quality early care and education can change the course of these children’s lives far beyond the preschool classroom, making them 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 23 percent more likely to attend higher education, 50 percent less likely to become a teen parent, and significantly less likely to participate in criminal activity. Through many long-term research studies these children have been shown to need less special education and grade retention, have higher standardized test scores from preschool through high-school, and have median incomes as adults much greater than their peers who did not participate in high-quality early care and education. In short- the research is overwhelming that early care and education is one of smartest investments a state can make, with a return on investment of $7-$17 for every dollar invested. Today I want to talk to you about the investments we think are critical in the 2012-2013 budget to preserve the gains we have made in building quality early childhood programs, and the steps we can take to move the system forward even in difficult budget times.
To achieve the remarkable outcomes documented in early childhood research, studies tell us that children need a safe environment that provides positive and consistent interaction with their caregivers, enriching learning opportunities, and adequate health care and nutrition. We believe that parents are the first and most important resource to provide this environment. That is why we support Ohio’s investment in the Help Me Grow home visiting program.

Help Me Grow serves as the first point of contact to Ohio’s early childhood system for many of our most at-risk children and families. Families participating in Help Me Grow have significant hurdles to overcome, and intensive home visiting services offer an opportunity to provide information, support, and connection to crucial health and developmental services starting during a mother’s pregnancy and extending until their first child is three years old.

That is why Groundwork supports the Executive budget proposal to fund Help Me Grow services for these at-risk children at $33.6 million per year, to support quality home visiting services statewide and can leverage additional federal dollars through Medicaid and new federal grant funding.

While home visiting provides critical tools and information for parents, we know that 68 percent of households in Ohio with children ages birth to five have all available parents in the workforce. These parents are the engine of Ohio’s economic recovery. Quality child care provides the support that working families need to maintain stable employment and provide safe and reliable care for their children. We have one of those parents here to speak to you about how Ohio’s investments in our child care system are improving the lives of their families everyday.

groundWork understands the Executive Budget’s recommended eligibility structure for child care, given that in these difficult budget times even our most essential programs must face temporary reductions in services. We believe that as additional revenues are available to the state, this should be one of the first programs restored to its current funding level. While reducing the eligibility for intake to 125 percent FPL will limit enrollment in the program by an estimated 2,400 families per year, maintaining outtake levels at 200 percent FPL and allowing all children currently enrolled to remain in the program greatly increases continuity and stability for children and families, as well as program viability and quality for providers, and keeps our working parents in the workforce.

While safe and reliable care is essential for working parents, additional investments in quality are a critical component of ensuring that our child care services also prepare children to enter school ready to learn. The quality of the early care and education system that we provide for these children will greatly impact their ability to succeed in the K-12 system, move on to higher education, and become successful adults. All of the results that I spoke about earlier come from programs that are staffed with teachers trained in early childhood development and who are receiving adequate compensation, classrooms with low teacher-student ratios, and
curricula that is research-based and takes into account the unique needs and learning style of young children.

Ohio has made great strides toward increased child care quality through our Step Up To Quality program. Step Up To Quality increases the availability of school readiness-focused child care programs through technical assistance to increase quality, a rating system to incentivize parents to choose quality programs, and quality improvement awards and slightly higher reimbursements for quality programs to enable them to maintain those services. About one out of four of Ohio’s over 4,200 licensed child care facilities is “star” rated through Step Up To Quality, serving approximately 77,000 subsidized and non-subsidized children throughout Ohio.

groundWork supports investing in child care quality to the greatest extent possible to significantly improve school readiness outcomes for children. The Executive Budget’s allocation of $27.7 million to child care quality represents a 30 percent reduction below the FY 2011 investment in this area, but does fund critical quality infrastructure supports such as Step Up to Quality. Quality funding will provide both a short and long-term return on investment to the state, and will provide a significant return on investment. If additional revenues are available to the state, the 30 percent reduction made in the Executive Budget to child care quality should be a priority for restoration of funding.

Finally, Groundwork strongly supports continued funding for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Treatment Services through child care centers and the child welfare system. This has been a highly successful part of Ohio’s continuum of early childhood services, providing effective early intervention through families and school-based caregivers. For a relatively small investment, these services can dramatically change the course of a family’s life, and can save the state significant costs down the line.

We know that during these difficult budget times we need to maximize our economic potential as a state, but we also know that many of our most vital human services are in more demand than ever, including early childhood services. groundWork supports the proposals that Community Solutions has put forward regarding closing tax loopholes, restoring the top income tax on the highest income bracket, and pursuing a more balanced to business taxes.

James Baldwin, one of America’s most famous authors, wrote "For these are all our children...We will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."

We know that all of Ohio’s citizens will profit from a high-quality early care and education system, both now and for generations to come. We ask that you build on your investments in our early childhood system to support working families and give our youngest children every chance to succeed.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.