

## **Testimony on New Early Childhood Education Initiatives Provisions of House Bill 64, the Fy16-17 Biennial Budget**

Ohio Senate Committee for Medicaid  
Senator Burke, Chair  
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Office of the Governor

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Cafaro and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the new early childhood and school counseling initiatives within sections of House Bill 64, the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Biennial Budget. I am Angel Rhodes, Early Education and Development Officer in the Office of Governor John Kasich. I work with the Ohio Departments of Education; Job and Family Services; Health; Mental Health and Addiction Services; and Developmental Disabilities in the area of early childhood to align agency programs, remove silos, implement best practices and improve quality. I also oversee the nearly \$70 million *Early Learning Challenge Grant* to build the state's early childhood infrastructure and improve early learning services to Ohio's children.

I am speaking to you today because it is important to look at early childhood initiatives in the budget from a holistic standpoint and understand the important role each program plays in the overall system. As the Governor's Early Childhood Education and Development Officer, I am providing this holistic picture for the early childhood initiatives in the Executive Budget proposal that are spread across multiple agencies; and thus I am testifying in front of different respective committees.

In my testimony I will provide information on:

- The Early Learning Challenge Grant;
- And two of the early childhood initiatives in HB64: Preschool expansion and the necessary support from Early Childhood Mental Health Counselors.

### **Ohio's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant**

Ohio was one of the first nine states awarded a federal Early Learning Challenge grant in 2011. After three rounds of grants, Ohio's award of almost \$70 million is still the highest of all states' awards, and we have completed the third year of the four-year grant. The grant allowed for an unprecedented opportunity for Ohio to focus deeply on reforms of state-level systems and infrastructure that support children from birth to five by developing new standards, assessments, professional development, data systems and a common rating system for programs known as the Step Up To Quality- Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Ohio's Early Learning Challenge grant application laid out an aggressive early childhood reform agenda to close the kindergarten readiness gap for disadvantaged children. These early experiences lay the foundation for all subsequent learning for a child.

Prior to the Challenge Grant, Ohio had a disjointed set of siloed programs with little focus on quality, which ultimately did not address the needs of the children served and left parents at a disadvantage when it came to making informed decisions for their child.

Thanks to a strong focus, much has changed in Ohio. As the third year of the four-year grant came to a close in December 2014, I am happy to say our state agencies have aligned their work to ensure all types of early learning programs and providers that serve children birth to age 5, including preschools in school districts and child care in private and community-based programs, are part of a coordinated system for early childhood education.

As a state we now:

- Use one set of state generated child standards for birth to age 5 to ensure academic, social, emotional and physical development in young children;
- Hold all publicly funded programs to common program quality standards and both the departments of education and Job and Family Services monitor them in the same way through Step Up To Quality which I will discuss further momentarily;
- Provide high-quality regional professional development to early childhood professionals to ensure they have access to ongoing professional growth opportunities; and
- Have a comprehensive Kindergarten Readiness Assessment that will help us understand, beyond literacy, how to support children as they enter school academically, socially, emotionally and physically.

Some of the key accomplishments over these three years include:

- Increased the number of publicly funded programs participating in Step Up To Quality by 580 sites (from 1010 to 1590);
- Transitioned the number of children with high needs enrolled in high-quality, publicly funded programs from 12,080 to 44,082 (32,002 transitioned); and
- Providing 31,500 early childhood professionals with new professional development opportunities.

Our work on the Early Learning Challenge grant has taught us that in order to successfully move our early childhood system forward, we must take a holistic approach to creating new or expanding current initiatives. This is reflected in the Governor's early childhood proposals in House Bill 64. Through increased funding and supports for early childhood programs proposed by the Governor in HB64, Ohio will be able to assure children are fully supported in their growth and development throughout the birth to grade-3 continuum.

### **Increasing Access to High Quality Preschool**

Ohio has over 720,000 children under the age of six and approximately 55 percent of those children are considered high needs based on family income being under 200% of the federal poverty level, native language or having identified disabilities. We know from examining ten years of data from our Kindergarten Readiness Assessment that there is an approximately 25-30 percentage point achievement gap in the skills of high-needs children as they enter kindergarten compared to their peers.

Research shows that children who participate in high quality preschool programs demonstrate enhanced language skills, and improved reading and math skills through grade three. They also are less likely to be retained in the early grades and less likely to be referred for special

education services. Access to high quality preschool is clearly an important factor in reducing the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged children.

The Executive Budget in House Bill 64 proposes an additional \$40 million to provide high-quality preschool. This would increase the level of funding in FY16 by \$15 million and increases the funding by another \$10 million in FY17. The new funds will be distributed across the state to high needs areas identified through three indicators: high levels of poverty, low kindergarten readiness scores and low 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores. The Department of Education expects to serve approximately 6,125 additional children in FY17, over FY15, with this added funding, bringing the total number of children served to 17,215.

Currently the ECE preschool program serves 3 and 4-year olds in families living below 200% of the federal poverty level. To move toward the goal of insuring that all economically disadvantaged children have access to at least one year of preschool, in FY17 the ECE preschool program will transition to provide services only to economically disadvantaged 4-year-old children. Through this FY16-17 expansion in ECE preschool funding, along with existing high quality publicly funded child care and federal Head Start, Ohio will be serving approximately 64 percent of its population of 4-year-old children in families with incomes below 200% of poverty.

### **Early Childhood Mental Health Counselors**

The impact of poverty and trauma on young children can have a lasting effect on their emotional and academic wellbeing and is often exhibited through problematic behaviors in the classroom. It is important to note that preschool expulsion is a significant problem, and preschool expulsion rates are higher than k-12 expulsions. To help address these issues, Ohio implemented an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant pilot through the Early Learning Challenge grant which (1) provided education to early childhood staff on best practices to address difficult behaviors and keep children in the classrooms; and (2) provide site-based support and training directly with early childhood staff experiencing difficulties. Based on the strong outcomes in this pilot over the past three years, we seek to expand this pilot statewide by providing \$5 million in each year of the biennium to make early childhood mental health practitioners available to all early childhood staff statewide.

With this program there would be one central intake number for the state and an early childhood mental health practitioner would make a site visits within 48 hours of a request to conduct observations of the child and the environment, train staff, model best practices, work with families and develop support plans for children in need. The primary goal of this initiative is to get the right care, to the right children, at the right time, and to do this early enough to make a difference in their educational and future success.

As Ohio expands access to high quality preschool for economically disadvantaged children, it is critical to provide this important support that will help children to stay in their early childhood settings and arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

Chairman Burke, this concludes my testimony. I greatly appreciate the committee's time and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Addendum:

Summary of preschool expansion

- Approximately 140,000 4-year olds living in Ohio
- Approximately 70,000 of those 4-year olds live in families with incomes below 200% of the FPR

Table 1: Preschool slots with the FY2016-17 expansion

	Program	# of slots available
1	ODE – Preschool slots	17,215
2	ODE Special Ed Preschool slots	7,419
3	Head Start preschool slots (4-yr olds)	20,065
4	Total number of existing preschool slots (lines 1,2,3, combined)	44,699

- ❖ With the preschool expansion in FY16-17, Ohio will be serving 64% of the 70,000 4 year-olds living below 200% FPL.
  - The DELTA for preschool for the 70,000 economically disadvantaged 4-year olds after SFY17 is 25,301
    - $25,301 \times \$4,081 = \$103,253,381$
    - Serving approximately 64% of the 70,000 in high quality preschool settings
- ❖ Typically there is an 80% uptake of state subsidized programs. 80% of the 70,000 4-year olds below 200% FPL is 56,000
  - The DELTA for preschool for the 56,000 economically disadvantaged 4-year olds after SFY17 is 11,301
    - $11,301 \times \$4,081 = \$46,119,381$
    - Serving approximately 80% of the 56,000

High-quality preschool, includes requirements for a locally selected research-based curriculum aligned to the state created early childhood learning and development standards, use of assessments to inform instruction, health and developmental screenings, teacher credentials and family engagement.