



**House Bill 96 Interested Party Testimony
House Children & Human Services Committee
March 5th, 2025
Stephanie Keinath, Executive Vice President
Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce**

Good afternoon, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill 96 today. My name is Stephanie Keinath and I am the Executive Vice President for the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce. As the leading voice of business in the Dayton region, the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce represents over 2200 member businesses across fourteen counties in southwest Ohio. We continue to hear from our businesses, large and small, across all industries, that workforce attraction and retention is their number one concern.

In this tight labor market, we are seeing employers interested in engaging on issues that previously may not have been at the top of the list regarding workforce concerns...namely, transportation, housing and child care. In particular, over the past year, the Dayton Area Chamber has collaborated with Preschool Promise, an organization focused on kindergarten readiness in Montgomery County, to conduct onsite meetings with many local employers about their child care needs. We've heard a range of challenges: everything from the need for back-up child care for those employees who would otherwise miss work when their primary child care falls through at the last minute, to the need to help employees navigate benefits they may be eligible for but are currently not accessing, to the bigger challenge of how to increase capacity in parts of our community that lack the infrastructure.

In January, we were thrilled to work with several partners, including Groundwork Ohio and Wright State University, to host a summit titled The Workforce Equation: Why Child Care Matters for Ohio's Businesses. Over three hundred leaders attended and heard from a variety of national leaders who are tackling this issue in their own communities. One leader we heard from was SugarCreek Packing, who has identified child care as a significant need for their workforce and they've invested in near site child care for several of their manufacturing sites as a result. What has become clear, through all of our conversations with employers, is that there is no single solution that will work for all businesses. What may be feasible for some of our large employers will likely not be feasible for the over 48% of small businesses who site lack of child care as a major obstacle for staffing.

Over the past several years, we've been fortunate to work with Chair White, Director Kara Wentz and Governor DeWine to support some important improvements to child care access and affordability in Ohio. As this budget is considered, I want to emphasize our strong support for the continuation of The Child Care Choice Voucher Program, which serves families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL)



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and provides safe, reliable, and high-quality child care options in schools, centers, and home-based settings. Through Child Care Choice, over 7,100 additional children have been connected with high-quality early learning programs, enabling more than 4,800 families to join or grow Ohio's workforce. This expansion of eligibility to include families up to 200 % of the FPL is a key factor in ensuring that an important part of our workforce can return to work or remain working.

We look forward to working with this committee over the next year to identify additional ways to support Ohio's workforce, including flexible and innovative child care solutions. These are challenges that require all of us, public sector leaders, private sector leaders and the families themselves, to work together to ensure that the significant growth that Ohio is experiencing is supported by an equally robust and reliable workforce. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I'm happy to answer questions.