



**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Committee – RE: Substitute House Bill 33
Written Testimony from Starting Point
Submitted April 20, 2023**

Chairman Edwards, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, Starting Point is grateful for your time and attention considering the following requests related to early care and education investments in HB 33.

Starting Point a non-profit organization that prepares children and youth for a lifetime of success by building the capacity of professionals to provide high-quality care and education and connecting families to those services. We serve families and child care, pre-school, and out-of-school time programs in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, and Geauga counties. As such, we recognize that child care and a strong local workforce are intimately intertwined. For parents to participate in the workforce, child care must be accessible and affordable. To build a strong workforce for the future, high-quality child care and early education are critically important.

We appreciate that Substitute House Bill 33 maintains Governor DeWine’s proposed increase of initial eligibility for publicly funded childcare (PFCC) to 160 percent of the FPL and maintains the creation of an Ohio Department of Children and Youth. These investments will increase access to child care in our community.

Additional investments are needed in child care to support our workforce today and our workforce for tomorrow. Ohio continues to experience a child care crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as employers in our community struggle to find adequate staffing. In December 2022, Starting Point’s *Child Care Workforce Survey* showed an estimated 2,500 vacant child care positions in child care programs in Northeast Ohio, representing a 20% reduction in workforce in the field. Child care programs report classroom closures and waiting lists, and families are struggling to find accessible care.

We urge you to restore funding that will further support workforce development and education for young children. Specifically, **we request the restoration of the \$150 million of ARPA funding dedicated in the original version of HB-33 to support child care scholarships and development of additional capacity in available infant-toddler care.** This funding will support workforce development by creating scholarship funds for individuals in critical roles – including child care professionals – that earn income at or below 200% of the FPL. These funds would also support the creation of new child care seats for infants and toddlers, an age range for which many families are struggling to find child care.

We further request **support for an amendment to add \$30 million in new GFR dollars dedicated to award child care infrastructure grants.** This funding would support safe and developmentally appropriate child care for infants and toddlers in Appalachian communities and

communities with high infant mortality rates. Grants could be used to provide workforce supports, family engagement and support, mental health services, professional development and technical assistance, facilities improvement, and classroom supplies. This is particularly important to our region, as Cuyahoga County's infant mortality rate remains higher than the state average. Access to high-quality child care programs increases the likelihood that infants will be cared for in an environment with safe sleep practices when not in the care of a parent. Child care programs can also provide families with connections to other resources that decrease risks to babies.

We urge this committee to recognize that child care has been underfunded and undervalued, and to make the needed investments to support working families in Ohio. We are happy to answer any questions. Thank you for your time and attention.

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