

Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
FY2020-2021 Operating Budget
Imagination Station Learning Center
Michelle Davidson, President
June 5, 2019

Good Afternoon, Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Michelle Davidson, President and owner of Imagination Station Learning Center in Preble County, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony concerning Substitute House Bill 166, Ohio's budget bill for state fiscal years 2020 and 2021. My testimony is limited to comment and concern on Ohio's quality child care system.

I am an early childhood professional who has resided in Preble County for the past 30 years while raising a family of four children within the community of Eaton. I have worked at various centers in our city for over 15 years. The last 7 years I have worked at Imagination Station Learning Center in which I created and opened myself as a private, ODJFS state-licensed center. Our objective in opening the center was to provide local families with a better choice in early childhood education than what was offered in our community.

Preble County is rural and small in population. Imagination Station is one of a handful of private centers in the community and now serves over 50 families. We have networked and partnered with various early childhood organizations, the community school system, the Ohio Healthy Food Program and the local YMCA. We have focused on providing resources and guidance to our families concerning parenting education, family nutrition and physical fitness education, state resource availability including workforce skill education and the importance of kindergarten preparedness for our children. We recognize and support all avenues for children to develop and thrive as well-balanced individuals to reach their fullest potential.

One-third of our center families rely on state-funded child care assistance in order to work and provide their children with an early childhood education with the benefits our center has to offer, in which otherwise, they would not be able to afford this very critical developmental necessity to quality care and education for their children. Our private pay families currently struggle to provide this opportunity to their children without assistance; therefore, we keep weekly tuition as competitive as possible streamlining our budget to provide the best education possible with already limited funds.

I have recently been informed of the proposed child care rate update and have no doubt that, without your intervention, it will have a direct, devastatingly negative effect on all the early childhood centers in Preble County. We have strived to meet the state quality mandates with our current budget. Our county is in desperate need of more state funding to provide quality care and remain a valuable community resource. Should the state provide us with less funding, our program will be forced to immediately decrease or eliminate much needed resources in which our children currently benefit from such as

classroom supplies, competitive wages and benefits for our teaching staff and exceeding minimum child/teacher classroom ratios. Private pay families will also have an immediate tuition increase. The quality of early childhood care and education in Preble County will immediately decrease and will neutralize all the time and effort we have accomplished to improve our programs. Private pay families may not afford to keep their children enrolled and our county's early childhood centers may have no choice but to close.

I urge you on behalf of the families and children of Preble County, to support amendment number SC3663 so that no children lose access to quality care and education within Preble County and the other 12 counties designated for a reduction in state funding.

Thank you for your time and consideration.