

Testimony on HB 119
Before the House Finance and Appropriations Committee
Human Services Subcommittee

4/3/07

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The United Way of Greater Cincinnati believes that Early Childhood Care and Education needs to be a funding priority in this state budget (House Bill 119). As a funder of these same programs, we recognize the importance of investing in our youngest children to ensure they are prepared to start school ready to learn. We believe that kindergarten readiness is the most important priority for school success and our state's long-term economic health. We invest in home visitation, increasing the quality of child care and increasing the number of children who can access quality care.

United Way is a founding member and funder of the broad-based state-wide coalition known as groundWork™. Our budget recommendations, many of which are included in the Executive Budget, provide the base for a strong start for Ohio's children. We are strongly supportive of their package of recommendations and hope that you will be supportive as well.

In Southwest Ohio we are using private United Way contributions to fund home visitation, because we know it is the most effective early intervention service for expectant parents, newborns, infants, toddlers and their families. We invest more than \$2 million dollars annually in the very successful Every Child Succeeds early intervention program, and the results we get are worth every bit of that investment. But our private dollars aren't enough to reach all the children who need these services, and more state dollars are needed. We hope you will support expanding the Help Me Grow Program to serve an additional 6,000 children across the state.

We are also working in our region to increase the quality of child care and the number of children who can attend quality care. We know that attending quality preschool or child care increases a child's potential for school success. Thus we hope you will support making high-quality early education opportunities available to an additional 4,000 children ages birth to six by:

- Making eligibility for all child care programs 200% of the federal poverty level
- Reimbursing child care centers at 65% of the 2006 market rate, so they can afford to serve low-income children with quality programs

We also need your support to increase child care quality by:

- Providing adequate resources to support the expansion of Ohio's quality rating system for child care – Step Up to Quality
- Strengthening professional development of child care teachers by increasing the number of T.E.A.C.H. higher education scholarships

Finally, we know from our work that one of the greatest unmet needs in our communities is funding for both behavioral health screening and treatment, and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. Parents and child care providers are frustrated and discouraged at their inability to find help for children with social, emotional and behavioral problems. This area is not adequately addressed in the Executive Budget, and we hope the legislature will remedy that.

I know this is a tight budget, but I am urging you to prioritize these services for children, not only because they are the right thing to do, but because they are the smart thing to do. The data is clear – investing in young children gives them a much better chance of succeeding in school and life and that is good for all of us.