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**Ohio House of Representatives
Families, Aging & Human Services
House Bill 145
Holly Hankinson
Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation
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Chairman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member West and members of the committee, my name is Holly Hankinson and I am the Advocacy Director of the Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 145, which would expand initial child care eligibility from 130% of the Federal Poverty Level to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The Women's Fund leads our community in ensuring the economic self-sufficiency of women in our region, and ignites a shared desire to improve it. We have more than two decades of deep involvement, understanding and building results to address women's self-sufficiency issues, and have spent the past eight years researching the challenges of lower-wage workers and families.

The Women's Fund is testifying today in support of House Bill 145 because child care is necessary infrastructure in our economy. It is essential to keep Ohio working by helping parents afford child care and ensuring more children in low-income families have access to high-quality care.

The journey to economic self-sufficiency is a long one, marked by complexity, economic fragility and frustration. As we talk with women across our region, we hear an innate desire to feel secure in their finances and provide for their families, without government or social service assistance. However, as hard as they work, they struggle to get ahead.

The public benefit system is meant to be a safety net for our community members when they experience economic hardship, providing a pathway out of poverty without sacrificing basic needs like food, housing and child care. While the purpose of this system is well-meaning, public benefits do not provide a pathway out of poverty for many

participants. There are structural disincentives making the journey from minimum wage to self-sufficiency longer without significant financial gain.

One of the most significant factors in this financial struggle is the low eligibility threshold in our publicly funded child care system. Currently, a family is only eligible for publicly funded child care if they make under 130% FPL, or less than \$22,000 per year for a single-parent household with one child. If the family enters the workforce making an amount above this threshold, they receive no child care assistance at all. With the average cost of child care for a four-year old at over \$7,500 per year,¹ this is a huge and nearly insurmountable burden for Ohio families. Ohio should raise its eligibility threshold to 200% FPL, providing more stability for low wage families.

Raising the eligibility threshold becomes even more critical when we consider what it takes for a family to achieve economic self-sufficiency, meaning the ability to meet their basic needs without reliance on public benefits. Unlike the FPL, the Self-Sufficiency Standard measures the direct cost of basic family needs and considers geographical location and family makeup. In an analysis of the Self-Sufficiency Standard in five locations representing rural, suburban and urban Ohio counties, the threshold for economic self-sufficiency for a single-parent household with one child ranges from 189% FPL in rural Brown County to 261% FPL in urban Franklin County.² This demonstrates that even in places with the lowest cost of living, affordable child care is simply out of reach for many families without public assistance.

Finally, ensuring access to affordable and high-quality child care is necessary to reopening the economy in a post-pandemic world. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating on our economy and workers; working parents and mothers in particular have been disproportionately affected. Of the hundreds of thousands of workers who have stopped working in the past year, women ages 25-44 are nearly three times as likely as

¹ Economic Policy Institute. (2020). *The Cost of Child Care in Ohio*. Retrieved: <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/OH>

² Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. (2020). *The Cliff Effect and Other Disincentives in our Public Benefit System*. Retrieved: <https://www.gcfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/00.-2020-The-Cliff-Effect-and-Other-Disincentives-in-our-Public-Benefit-System.pdf>

men to not be working due to child care demands (32% of women compared to just 12% of men are not working because of a lack of child care).³ It has never been a more critical time to support our working families.

In order for these parents to return to work and help reopen the economy, it is critical that they have access to affordable child care.

This issue is critical for Ohio families, workers and the re-opening of our economy. I urge you to support House Bill 145, expanding child care eligibility from 130% to 200% FPL, and provide necessary support to Ohio families and children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

³ United States Census Bureau. (2020). *Working Moms Bear Brunt of Home Schooling While Working During COVID-19*. Retrieved: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/parents-juggle-work-and-child-care-during-pandemic.html>