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**Written Testimony for the Ohio House of Representatives
Children and Human Services Committee
House Bill 96**

**Patricia Gleason, COO, Learning Grove
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Chairperson White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee, my name is Patricia Gleason and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Learning Grove. I write today to urge you to prioritize critical investments in early childhood programs in Ohio's FY2026-27 state budget, House Bill 96.

Learning Grove is a key provider of child care and early learning programs in Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky. We serve a racially and socioeconomically diverse population of nearly 7,000 children, youth, and families annually with programs across our region. We are the single largest provider of publicly subsidized child care in Hamilton County.

We believe all children deserve to be nurtured through high-quality education, to think critically, get along with others, and set the path toward a productive future. To help realize these experiences, we never compromise on practices and programs that are best for children. All our programs achieve the highest quality rating in both states. We know it is critical to have qualified teachers, effective ratios of adults to children and appropriate group sizes for children to learn. We also know some children need access to physical and mental health services and other interventions and that those services are most effective with young children.

Groundwork Ohio has outlined key priorities that will strengthen our state's early childhood system, and we ask that you support them in the Governor's budget:

Make work pay for working families with young children.

- Increase access to affordable, quality child care for working families to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Implement a refundable child tax credit for working parents with young children.

Support quality early learning experiences that prepare children for Kindergarten

- Invest in effective early childhood educators to meet the growing needs of young children by improving payment practices to child care programs.
- Strengthen Early Development and Literacy Support: Increase state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations assessments, and service coordination

for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, while also expanding access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives.

Improve health outcomes for moms and babies.

- Increase access to evidence-based home visiting programs including expanding the Family Connects model statewide.
- Invest and scale community impact models like Cradle Cincinnati to encourage collaboration between women, clinicians, hospitals, managed care and other community partners to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

Ohio's child care providers are in crisis. Learning Grove has closed six of the twenty centers we operate. Without additional state funding for child care, programs across the state face the same challenges we do. Ohioans cannot go back to work without access to child care. The child care workforce is essential to allowing all other workers to do their jobs. Child care cannot be ignored in this budget.

Extraordinarily dedicated women and men innovate and advocate for our children, parents, and community. We provide the highest quality education for each child and work to support their parents and caregivers. Together we transform lives and help build brighter futures. Together we strive for lifelong success.

We see every day the toll that an underfunded child care system takes on working parents struggling to make ends meet, on businesses who can't recruit and retain employees who don't have child care, and on child care workers whose salaries are so low that they qualify for a child care subsidy for their own children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please reach out to me directly if you have questions about our testimony or Ohio's child care system.

Sincerely,
Patti



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