June 11, 2021

Members of the General Assembly,

As organizations supporting children with disabilities and their families from across the state, we want to make you aware of how proposed changes in HB110 regarding Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) may affect Ohio’s children.

As you know, SUTQ is based on national research identifying standards which lead to improved outcomes for children. Two areas of critical importance to Ohio’s children with disabilities and their families are standards around Child Screening and Assessment (CSA) and Professional Development (PD).

As it pertains to CSA, making SUTQ voluntary removes the requirement for early care and education programs to screen children for disabilities. If they do choose to screen, there will be no requirement the program’s tool is valid, reliable, assesses critical domains, or is administered by trained staff.

Screening is critical to children with disabilities. Intervention before kindergarten has huge academic, social, and economic benefits. Studies have shown that children who receive early treatment for developmental delays are more likely to graduate from high school, hold jobs, live independently, and avoid teen pregnancy, delinquency, and violent crime, which results in a savings to society of about $30,000 to $100,000 per child.

In addition, SUTQ requires program professionals to receive approved training in child development – training which allows them to not only recognize “red flags” in development, but also to include ALL children in their programs – including children who are not “typically developing”, Ohio’s children with disabilities.

Families of children with disabilities already experience extreme difficulty finding childcare (see [Office of Policy brief](https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/FFEarlycare.pdf)). Under HB110 these families would experience an increase in eligibility for publicly-funded childcare and a decrease in access – programs will no longer be required to have the knowledge, skill, or ability to identify, support or include their children.

Should the provision in the Senate version of HB110 be included in the final budget bill, Ohio will have to determine:

1. How we will meet federal requirements to identify, locate, and evaluate Ohio’s children with disabilities who need early intervention or special education services; and
2. How we will ensure Ohio’s children with disabilities and their families have access to early care and education programs with the knowledge, skill, and ability to include them.

We stand ready to answer your questions and provide more information on the critical link between high quality, publicly-funded childcare, children with disabilities, and long-term outcomes. Please contact Teresa Kobelt, director of OCALI’s Office of Policy (teresa\_kobelt@ocali.org), if you would like additional information or to set up a stakeholder meeting.

Sincerely,

Shawn Henry, Executive Director, *OCALI*

Gretchen Behimer, President, *Ohio Family & Children First Coordinators Association*

Kari Jones, President & CEO, *Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio*

Toni Mullee, Executive Director, *The Up Side of Downs of Northeast Ohio*

Jim Hudson, Executive Director, *Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati*

Krista Huff, Executive Director, *Down Syndrome Association of Greater Toledo*

Michele Jones, Executive Director, *Down Syndrome Association of the Valley*

Willie Cox, Executive Director, *Miami Valley Down Syndrome Association*

Robin Suzelis, Executive Director, *Autism Society of Mahoning Valley*

Laurie Cramer, Executive Director, *Autism Society of Greater Akron*

Kathi Machle, Managing Director, *Autism Society Central Ohio*

Kate Schwartz, Executive Director, *Autism Society Northwest Ohio*

Mary Helen Richer, CEO, *Autism Society Greater Cincinnati*

Ilka Riddle, PhD, Director, *University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities*