



May 20, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine
 Riffe Center, 30th Floor
 77 South High Street
 Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine,

We, **the 31 undersigned organizations**, are writing on behalf of the women and families across the state of Ohio experiencing the far-reaching and devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. **As your administration moves forward with the next steps to reopen businesses and child care centers in Ohio, we urge you to prioritize, value, and respond to the needs of women and families in those decisions and actions.**

No matter where they are from or what they look like, Ohioans work hard and deserve a job where they can stay healthy, care for loved ones, and provide for their families. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for far too many working people even in normal times - and the COVID-19 pandemic has further threatened the stability of countless Ohio families, especially for women and people of color whose wages and employment status have been hit the hardest by this crisis.

In March, your administration took decisive action to stop the spread of COVID-19 across our communities, and it no doubt has saved lives. However, since that time, this crisis has exacerbated the gender and racial inequalities in access to economic security and workplace protections. The solution must be to center the needs and perspectives of women by advancing policies that support them, with a focus on women of color.

Women are foundational to the success of Ohio precisely because of their dual roles in our communities as both caregivers and breadwinners. Women are the backbone of families: they take on a disproportionate share of the caregiving responsibilities for children and other family members. Women keep our economy strong: at the start of this year, women outnumbered men in the workforce, and they are sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds (67 percent) of families. ¹In fact in Ohio, 85 percent of Black mothers, 62 percent of Latina mothers, and 53 percent of white mothers are key family breadwinners in their households.²

These are the facts in normal times. In the COVID-19 crisis, the importance of women in our economy and families is exponentially greater, as they are on the frontlines of this pandemic both as caregivers within their families and as the majority of frontline, essential workers. Yet the precariousness of their incomes is greater too: in April, women's overall unemployment reached above 15 percent, which is the highest it has been since the Bureau of Labor began reporting data by gender in 1948. For African American and Latinx women, it is even higher at 16.4 percent and 20.2 percent unemployment respectively.³

As Ohio's economy opens up, women's ability to return to work and the wages that they earn will be crucial to support their households during this crisis. For many working women and working mothers, the option to return to work is impossible without access to care for their children and other dependent family members. Due to school closures and regulations on summer activities prompted by the coronavirus outbreak, reliable childcare and enrichment activities for youth and young children are harder than ever to find.

What's more, high-quality care for young children has long been difficult to afford in Ohio. The average cost of quality child care for a one-year-old in Ohio is nearly \$15,000 a year, which puts an unrealistic burden on most household budgets.⁴ Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the already strained childcare system could break completely without adequate funding for providers and thoughtful steps to better support families and transform the system.

The care that women provide to their families extends beyond dependent children. In Ohio, 1.4 million people - disproportionately women - are currently caring for an aging loved one.⁵ Their ability to participate in the workforce typically relies on a web of other supports - many of which are now compromised or unavailable.

As you and your administration move forward with the re-opening of child care centers across the state, we urge you to take the following recommendations into consideration to ensure that no family is left behind:

- **Ensure that, along with child care providers, business owners, and health experts, a diverse representation of working parents, caregivers, and advocates have a seat at the table to guide our state's response;**
- **Strengthen work-from-home guidance for Ohio employers to ensure that working people who have the ability to work remotely can do so, even as more businesses begin to reopen workplaces;**
- **Guarantee job protection for working parents and caregivers who are required to return to work but are unable to access care for their family;**
- **Expand unemployment compensation eligibility to allow access to benefits for any working person with caregiving responsibilities who is forced to leave their job if they are unable to secure care;**
- **Ensure that solutions to provide care options for working people are comprehensive and include caregivers of elders and family members with disabilities;**
- **Launch an educational campaign in the state to raise awareness for employers and working people about the federal emergency paid sick and paid leave provisions that extend coverage to eligible working people who need leave to provide care to a child whose school or care provider is closed, or whose care provider is unavailable due to COVID-19;**
- **Utilize CARES Act funding to address gaps in the federal emergency paid sick and paid leave provisions for child care access, including providing full wage replacement and extending benefits to the millions of people exempted from coverage;**
- **Call on Congress to pass coronavirus-relief legislation to:**
 - **fill the gaps in coverage for paid sick days and paid leave provisions for child care (full wage replacement and extending coverage to those currently exempted)**
 - **provide additional state support in the form of dedicated, flexible funding for child care providers to ensure the strained child care system has the funding support it needs to adhere to health and safety protocols, sustain operations, and invest in childcare workers**

Without thoughtful attention to and timely action on these needs, far too many Ohioans - disproportionately women - will be forced to make the impossible choice between caring for a loved one and earning a paycheck.

We believe that the measure of success for our nation, our state, and our communities is in large part determined by the success of women. The reality is: We cannot rebuild our economy and revitalize our communities through this crisis without investing in solutions that center women. That means recognizing the dual role that many women play as caregivers and breadwinners in their families - and responding in kind.

Sincerely:

1. Children's Defense Fund, Ohio
2. Columbus Early Learning Centers
3. Equality Ohio
4. Equitas Health
5. Groundwork Ohio
6. Innovation Ohio
7. LEAD Ohio
8. NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
9. National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Chapter
10. National Coalition of 100 Black Women Central Ohio Chapter
11. National Council of Jewish Women/Cleveland
12. National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus Section
13. Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
14. Ohio Domestic Violence Network
15. Ohio Federation of Teachers
16. Ohio National Organization for Women
17. OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist Leadership in Ohio
18. Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
19. Ohio Women's Alliance
20. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
21. PL+US: Paid Leave for the US
22. Policy Matters Ohio
23. Preterm
24. Queen City Certified
25. South Side Early Learning
26. The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
27. The Women's Fund of Central Ohio
28. URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity
29. Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation
30. YWCA Columbus
31. YWCA Dayton

Cc: Jon Husted, Lieutenant Governor
Amy Acton, Director of Health
LeeAnne Cornyn, Director of Children's Initiatives
Kimberly Hall, Director of Jobs and Family Services

¹Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Continue to be the U.S. Norm," Center for American Progress, May 10, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/>

²Julie Anderson, Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016), 3. <https://iwpr.org/publications/breadwinner-mothers-by-raceethnicity-and-state/>

³Claire Ewing-Nelson, After a Full Month of Business Closures, Women Were Hit Hardest by April's Job Losses (National Women's Law Center, 2020), 2. <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Jobs-Day-April-Factsheet.pdf>

⁴Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, Red Light Green Light: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2016 (National Women's Law Center, 2016). <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NWLC-State-Child-Care-Assistance-Policies-2016-final.pdf>

⁵"Ohio Family Caregivers Provide \$16.8 Billion in Unpaid Care to Family, Friends at Home," AARP, 2019, <https://states.aarp.org/ohio/ohio-family-caregivers-provide-16-8-billion-in-unpaid-care-to-family-friends-at-home>