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## PA House of Representatives Republican Policy Committee

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414, Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6144

**Rep. Joshua D. Kail**  
Chairman

### **PA House Republican Policy Committee Hearing**

#### **“Funding Our Children’s Future”**

**December 8, 2023, at 2 p.m.**

**Holy Family University  
Education and Technology Center Auditorium  
9801 Frankford Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19114**

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|-----------|---|
| 2:00 p.m. | Welcome and Pledge of Allegiance  |
| 2:05 p.m. | Welcome from Dr. Anne Prisco<br><i>President, Holy Family University</i>          |
|           | <b>Programs Panel</b>   |
| 2:10 p.m. | Zakiyyah Boone<br><i>CEO, Wonderspring Early Education</i>                        |
| 2:15 p.m. | Christi Buker, CAE<br><i>Executive Director, Pennsylvania Library Association</i> |
| 2:20 p.m. | Questions for Programs Panel  |
|           | <b>Parents Panel</b>  |
| 2:50 p.m. | Ryan Haney<br><i>Parent at Archbishop Ryan High School</i>                        |
| 2:55 p.m. | Floyd Faria<br><i>Parent at Archbishop Ryan High School</i>                       |
| 3:00 p.m. | Questions for Parents Panel   |
| 3:30 p.m. | Closing Comments  |



# Testifier Biographies

## PA House of Representatives Policy Committee Hearing *"Funding Our Children's Future"*



### **Zakiyyah Boone** **CEO, Wonderspring Early Education**

Zakiyyah Boone is the Chief Executive Officer at Wonderspring and is responsible for the programmatic direction of the organization's five high-quality early childhood education programs, its kindergarten program and its five out-of-school time programs. During her tenure, she has led the efforts to expand Wonderspring's early childhood education programs to new venues, including New Market West in 2021 and Havertown in 2023.

Zakiyyah has 22 years experience as an early childhood and youth development professional. Most recently, she served as Vice President of Early Childhood at the Greater Philadelphia YMCA where she managed a budget of \$20M, identified growth and partnership opportunities and ensured the appropriateness of facilities to deliver high-quality programs. A national leader in educational quality improvement, Zakiyyah led a nationwide initiative aimed at enhancing the ability of after school programs to improve student outcomes. Locally, she has cut the ribbon on 10 child care centers and launched multiple evidence-based youth development programs across the Greater Philadelphia region.

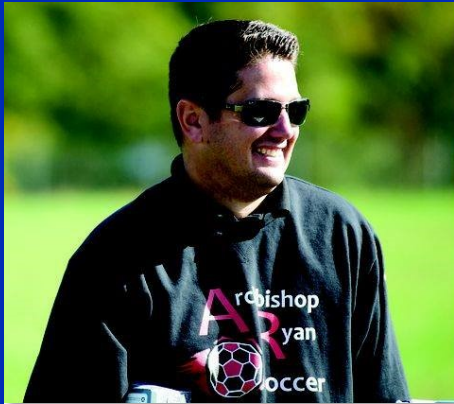
Zakiyyah holds a BS in Elementary Education from Millersville University and an MBA from Kaplan University. As a mother of two, she personally understands the impact that high-quality early education can have on children and families, especially with a high-quality childcare provider such as Wonderspring.

### **Christi Buker, CAE** **Executive Director, Pennsylvania Library Association**

Christi Buker currently serves as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Library Association. She previously served as the Executive Director of the Central PA Chapter Independent Electrical Contractors, a non-profit trade association that sponsors a registered apprenticeship program for training construction electricians, and as an Advisory Council Member for the Capital Region Partnership for Career Development.

Christi holds a bachelor's in international relations and business administration from American University and is a Certified Association Executive (CAE) with the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).





## **Ryan Haney** **Parent at Archbishop Ryan High School**

Ryan Haney, a proud graduate of Archbishop Ryan High School and father to two current students, presently serves as the head boys' soccer coach at the school.

With a decorated soccer career, he's earned accolades such as Southeastern Pennsylvania High School Soccer Player of the Year and Coach of the Year, showcasing his dedication to the sport. Notably, he's a member of the Archbishop Ryan Soccer Hall of

Fame, having excelled both as a player and a coach.

Haney pursued his collegiate studies at Temple University before completing them at Rider University.

## **Floyd Faria** **Parent at Archbishop Ryan High School**

Fleeing religious persecution in Pakistan, Floyd and his family sought refuge in America. From joining the American workforce as a dishwasher in a restaurant, a departure from his executive banking role in Pakistan, Floyd persevered and is currently employed at BNY Mellon.

With the opportunities provided by scholarship programs, Floyd believes he's realized the American dream by providing his children with an excellent education.

Floyd holds a Master of Business Administration in Human Resources Management and Services from the Pakistan Institute of Management.



## **Public Testimony of Zakiyyah Boone**

December 8, 2023

- Wonderspring Early Education is a nonprofit provider of early childhood education at 10 locations across the Greater Philadelphia region serving approximately 400 prek children annually with total enrollment nearly 1000 children.
- Contributions given through the EITC Pre-K Scholarship Program directly support Wonderspring children ages 3, 4 and 5 years old at Wonderspring's early childhood centers located in the Pottstown School District and the School District of Philadelphia.
- Current Pre K subsidized funding supports families that live up to 300% of poverty or \$60,480 for a family of 3. With the cost of childcare averaging about \$13,000 per year, this means that up to 50% of a family's post-tax annual income may be allocated to childcare. EITC scholarships support families that are not eligible for subsidized programs but for whom the cost of childcare is still too expensive. This typically ranges for families that are living between 300% and 400% of the poverty level or between \$60,480 to \$80,640 for a family of three.
- PreK hours in publicly funded programs are usually Sept through June 9a-3p leaving families without care for the full work day as well as for the summer. EITC funds supports learning during these periods to enhance academic progress and prevent summer slide. It also enables low income parents/caregivers to work to support their families.
- Several of the scholarships that we have awarded are for the children of our teachers. Without this extra support they often would not be able to afford to keep working, which would exacerbate the staffing crisis in early education.



Pennsylvania  
Library  
Association

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*A Chapter of the American Library Association*

December 8, 2023

Good afternoon members of the Republican Policy Committee and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Christi Buker, and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Library Association. Founded in 1901, we are a non-profit, charitable organization with a current membership of more than 1200 representing public libraries, academic and university libraries, school libraries, special libraries and the staff and trustees of these libraries.

In Pennsylvania, we have 467 state-aided public libraries. Approximately 85% of our public libraries are IRS registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, charitable organizations. More than 100 of these libraries operate on less than \$100,000 each year, and some as small as \$30,000. While not ideal, our libraries operate very leanly. Yet, these lean public libraries are powerful in contributing to the literacy and education of all ages.

The most recent data shows that 42 public library entities have registered as Educational Improvement Organizations (EIO). While this is just under 9% of all public libraries, I'd like to share some examples of how public libraries use any Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) funds. Summer learning and reading programs are the number one use by public libraries. During summer learning programs, libraries work to engage youth in reading and programs that help keep young minds learning and prevent the loss of skills achieved during the previous school year. Libraries across the commonwealth offer outstanding programs. Some bring outside experts to the library, purchase books to give to children, provide supplies, snacks, and incentives during summer programs. Programs range from science, history, literacy, technology camps, engineering, fire safety, music, art, and food science. This all contributes to the fun and joy of reading and learning and keeps their brains engaged.

Some libraries use EITC funds for year-round afterschool learning programs and book clubs. STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) clubs and LEGO building clubs are a few examples. These programs supplement the local school district's offerings and build on that learning in a safe space where their activities are not graded. This creates a space that is safe to do hands on activities, educate in a way that is fun and sparks imagination and builds confidence.

I'd like to highlight an example in Somerset County where they use EITC funds to support a STEAM initiative. In their own words:

*Several years ago, after attending meetings where workforce partners bemoaned the lack of local STEM professionals needed in our local workforce, library staff researched the issue. We found that some of the barriers to children choosing to pursue STEM careers included lack of access to technology and opportunities to practice STEM-related skills, lack of awareness about local STEM job opportunities, and the perception that jobs requiring STEM skills would be too difficult for people to learn. To start knocking down some of those barriers, we applied for a grant to purchase some STEM kits and do a pilot project of offering STEAM programming in a fun, non-threatening way in the comfort of the public library, without the pressure of a classroom setting with traditional performance evaluations. EITC funds have helped us to offset costs of STEM kits, replacement parts, STEM curricula, consumable supplies, and staff time needed to offer multiple STEAM summer camps, periodic after-school and weekend STEAM workshops and special events, plus a year-round weekly STEAM Club and monthly Inventors Club for school-age children.*

*I'll never forget the look in one young man's eyes when he first realized that he had the ability to code things. This was a case where the person's perception was that jobs involving robotics, automation, and computer programming would be*





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*beyond his capabilities. After a fun activity where this young man successfully led a small educational toy robot through a maze by drawing a series of color codes, I walked up to him and said, "Do you realize that you just wrote a computer program that controlled a robot?" The look on his face when he realized that he is capable of learning to code was priceless!*

Clearly, libraries are contributing to both the education of our young people, and also the future workforce!

When looking at the dollars, libraries are stretching every dollar they receive. Some libraries may receive a few thousand dollars, while larger libraries such as the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh receive over \$300,000. Most libraries have reported that the EITC funds may only be 1-2% of their total income, but they represent as much as 80% of the children's programming budgets at the library. Without these EITC funds, libraries wouldn't be able to hold as many programs or serve as many children. Quality programs require credentialed and qualified staff, and many other grants only cover materials with no support for staff. Multiple libraries noted their appreciation that EITC funds can be used to help cover staff costs for these programs.

I will note that several libraries indicated some struggles with EITC funds. One indicated that it was a fair amount of work for both the donors and recipients and wasn't yielding donations in their area. So, they stopped applying. Another library was disappointed that the requirements have narrowed to mostly K-6 children and that they couldn't support birth-kindergarten programs. Beyond completing the application and providing quality, structured programs, libraries have to do a fair amount of outreach and marketing as there are multiple entities asking for these same EITC funds.

While EITC funds are being used in both well-resourced and distressed communities, I'd like to share comments from the Reading Public Library:

*We primarily use EITC funds to help support a program we call Food for Thought. This program teaches kids how to prepare healthy, nutritious foods. Children learn how to properly prepare food, food safely, basic culinary skills, how to follow recipes, basic literacy, and much more. All this knowledge and skill is presented to them in a fun and tasty program that seems more like a party than an educational class. In an area of PA (Reading) where poverty is high and all students qualify for free breakfast/lunch, educating kids on healthy eating and nutrition is extremely important. It also helps provide a healthy snack to hold those children over after school until dinnertime.*

In closing, while EITC funds are not widely used by libraries (less than 9% of public libraries), those that are receiving the funds are very appreciative. Libraries receiving EITC donations are able to provide staff that organize meaningful and engaging educational programs after school and during the summer. Thank you for allowing me to share this information, and I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Christi Buker, CAE, Executive Director