



Child Health and
Development Institute
of Connecticut, Inc.



Children's Fund
of Connecticut, Inc.

TESTIMONY REGARDING FUNDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

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The Children's Fund of Connecticut and
the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut

Appropriations Committee Hearing
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Senator Beth Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, as President and CEO of the Children's Fund of Connecticut, a public charitable foundation and its non-profit subsidiary the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI), I am submitting this testimony on behalf of my board and staff. Together, the Children's Fund and CHDI work to ensure that children in Connecticut who are disadvantaged have access to and make use of a comprehensive, effective, community-based health and mental health care system. We often work in collaboration with state agencies and local communities.

There has been incredible progress over the past eight years in building early childhood systems and supports for families at the state level and in communities throughout Connecticut. We are concerned that some of the proposed budget cuts, particularly for the new Office of Early Childhood (OEC) will undercut some of that good work.

An area of successful collaboration that is helping communities across the State improve healthy development and school readiness for young children is one of those proposed cuts. The funds for "**Community Plans for Early Childhood**" support 52 Connecticut communities through support for their local early childhood councils (LECCs) in building early childhood systems to create an early childhood system that ensures optimal healthy development, leading to early learning success for Connecticut children of all races and income levels.

The Community Initiative is funded through a public-private partnership between OEC, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund (WCGMF) and the Children's Fund of Connecticut. Funding for individual communities is also supplemented locally, including 32 communities that secured new local public funding and 17 communities that secured new private philanthropic funding. In 2014, local support represented 39% of the total funding for community collaboratives and OEC's contribution represented 29%. Local financial support has more than doubled in two years to \$1.2 million. Combined with the funding from WCGMF and the Children's Fund, this results in a \$2.45 match for every single state dollar. These figures are for core infrastructure support only and do not include the millions of dollars in implementation funds.

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For children to succeed in school, attention to their health and social-emotional development beginning at birth is essential. Since 2008, the **Children's Fund has invested over \$1.4 million** to support this community effort to develop and integrate health and mental health strategies in their early childhood systems planning. This year, the following 33 communities received health grant funding from us: Ansonia, Branford, Bridgeport, Bristol, Chaplin, Colchester, Coventry, Danbury, Derby, East Hartford, Enfield, Griswold, Groton, Hamden, Killingly/Plainfield/Putnam/Sterling, Manchester, Mansfield, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Haven, Norwalk, Norwich, Plymouth, Southington, Stafford, Torrington, Vernon, Waterbury, West Hartford, Wethersfield and Winchester.

Our contribution extends beyond a financial commitment. CHDI provides ongoing technical assistance to help communities engage child health professionals, assess child health needs and gaps, and develop and monitor child health results and indicators for health-related objectives. In 2013-2014, CHDI's Early Child Health Data initiative provided additional funding and technical assistance to eight community collaboratives to harness local data from State Child Health Assessment Forms (yellow forms) and improve information sharing between health and early child care providers. WCGMF and the Grossman Family Foundation also provided funding.

As a result of the financial and technical assistance investments of the Children's Fund and CHDI, communities are ensuring young children are ready to learn by improving health outcomes. Many communities have successfully implemented strategies to promote healthy births, screen for developmental delays, address behavioral health concerns, and prevent obesity. For example:

- Norwalk was able to triple the number of children who received a dental screening before kindergarten (2007-2011), decrease the percentage of low birth weight babies, increase the number of children who had a primary care provider to lessen emergency department usage, and provide more children with developmental and behavioral health screening and early intervention services.
- Middletown increased its capacity to provide home visiting services to families by 400 percent (1992-2012), decreased the percentage of children with active tooth decay from 23 to 17 percent (2006-2011), and decreased the obesity rate among preschool-aged children (children with BMI at or above the 95th percentile) from 24 to 13 percent (2006-2014).

Other proposed budget cuts of deep concern to us are those for **Help Me Grow**, an incredibly successful model that is now being replicated in over 20 other states, funding for the **Early Childhood Cabinet**, and the **cutbacks to Medicaid**.

My Board of Directors and I fully appreciate that Connecticut is facing budget challenges and that difficult choices need to be made. Philanthropy, both collectively through the 14-member Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and separately, is committed to continuing support for local communities. However, the State is a significant and necessary partner and it is our hope that you will maintain the State's current level of investment in the budget for the next two years.

Through your vision and direction, Connecticut has made great strides in building an early childhood system, based on understanding the importance of cognitive, social-emotional health and physical development in the first years of life as the grounding for school readiness and lifelong well-being. We hope that commitment will continue as we all know that there is no better return than an investment in our youngest children.

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