



Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RESTORING FUNDING FOR *HELP ME GROW* IN THE STATE BUDGET

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Appropriations Committee Hearing

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:
I am Vice President for Health Initiatives at the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). Our mission is to promote primary and preventive health and mental health care for all children in Connecticut, with a particular focus on the underserved. Our Board Members include key state leaders in health care and members of the academic, education and business community who are committed to improving developmental outcomes for children in Connecticut. In this testimony, I urge your support for restoring Help Me Grow funding in the state budget, including support for Help Me Grow's central portal of entry, Child Development Infoline (CDI) at the United Way.

Over the past few years, Connecticut has invested significant dollars, human resources and energy in building a comprehensive early childhood system to ensure school readiness and lifelong outcomes for the state's youngest citizens. The legislature has supported establishment of the Office of Early Childhood and PA 13-178, which called improved early detection of children with developmental and behavioral health concerns and ensuring their connection to services. Beyond executive and legislative actions, private philanthropy, in partnership with a state agency, has supported 50 communities in developing early childhood plans. Other privately funded early childhood initiatives have promoted literacy development and pilot tested the Early Development Instrument in three communities to test its value in identifying gaps and supporting planning for early childhood services. Federal funding has supported still

other early childhood initiatives including home visiting and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems work to develop a coordinated system of developmental surveillance and screening in preschools and child care sites. In addition to these more recent initiatives, Connecticut has long benefited from excellent early childhood programs, including: Birth to Three services provided to more than 9,000 children annually, preschool special education services provided by local school districts, maternal and child health block grant services, and several other programs ranging from home visiting to family centers.

Help Me Grow is the lynchpin connecting all of these programs, partnering with, providing support to and contributing to each of these initiatives and ensuring that young children and their families are connected to the right service from the impressive array of early childhood opportunities. Help Me Grow helps families navigate the continuum of early childhood programs in their communities to those overseen by the state Office of Early Childhood. With four main components, Help Me Grow, in partnership with the United Way's Child Development Infoline (CDI), coordinates the work of several early childhood system participants. The four components include:

1. Help Me Grow **physician outreach** trains child health providers in developmental surveillance and screening and connection of children for whom there are concerns to the appropriate services. More than 200 child health provider sites have been trained, and as a result screening in Connecticut has increased from fewer than 2,000 children in 2007 to more than 30,000 in 2013. Data show that child health providers are willing to identify early childhood developmental concerns because they know that Help Me Grow can find services for children for whom surveillance and screening shows a need for evaluation or intervention services.
2. Through networking breakfasts in communities across Connecticut, Help Me Grow brings together Birth to Three contractors, preschool special education services from local school systems, preschool providers, child care providers and community service programs to share resources and coordinate services. HMG's **community outreach** component also monitors the availability of developmental services for young children. As a result, service gaps and barriers that families experience are identified and addressed through component three as described below.
3. **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).** Help Me Grow leadership address gaps in and barriers to accessing early childhood services through system level monitoring and collaboration with community and state level program leaders. The goal of Help Me Grow's CQI work is to ensure that **ALL** children for whom there are concerns are

connected to appropriate services early, when we know services are most effective. This is only possible when we have mechanisms that ensure that children who do not qualify for Birth to Three (approximately 40% of children evaluated each year), preschool special education or other intensive services can be connected to community-based developmental services, such as family centers, play groups and parent support opportunities. The fourth, and central component of Help Me Grow does this.

4. **Child Development Infoline (CDI)**, a specialized call center in the United Way's 211 information and referral system, fields more than 10,000 calls annually from parents, child health providers, child care providers and others with concerns about children's development. Callers are connected to the best next service (e.g. assessment, Birth to Three, parenting support, local school district). Care coordinators at CDI make linkages across the system of services for young children and support families in accessing existing services.

Documented results of Help Me Grow's impact include the de-medicalization of developmental concerns, which yields cost savings in the estimated range of \$2,300 per child with developmental concerns. Evaluation also has shown increased reported self-efficacy for 75% of a sample of parents and caregivers using CDI and accessing services through the Help Me Grow network. The success of Help Me Grow in Connecticut has led to its replication in 24 other states and inclusion in several federally funded early childhood initiatives, such as Project Launch, Race to the Top and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Funding for Help Me Grow must be reinstated so that Connecticut's early childhood efforts can be sustained across the many sectors that contribute to school readiness. Without Help Me Grow, other investments in early childhood will certainly be less effective.

Thank you.

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