



February 20, 2007

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishman and members of the Education Committee.

I am Catherine Wiley, MD, a general pediatrician and Clinical Director of the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, also known as Charter Oak at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. I am here today in my role as Medical Director of Reach Out and Read Connecticut, to lend my support to H. B. No. 7136 AN ACT CONCERNING A GRANT PROGRAM TO MATCH FEDERAL AND PRIVATE DOLLARS TO PROMOTE EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY IN THE PEDIATRIC CARE SETTING.

As a pediatrician, I view low literacy as a health problem. Like the approach to other health problems, the best strategy to deal with illiteracy is prevention. Reach Out and Read is a national program to promote literacy by changing the way pediatricians practice medicine. Reach Out and Read gives doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and learning. The program is highly economical, requiring little infrastructure, providing books purchased at a sharply discounted rate and relying on pediatricians as an army of highly trained volunteers and trusted authorities to bring this important preventive strategy to families. Just \$27.50 brings Reach Out and Read to a child all the way from birth to age 5 years.

In my practice, one mother from Ecuador told me that the only books in her home are the books I have given her. With three boys who have come regularly to their check-ups over the years, they now have a home library of nearly 30 books. The books are kept in a special bag and are brought out every night for reading. Twice mothers have cried when I gave them a book, saying that they had never seen a book in their home language before. Reach Out and Read makes these special moments possible.

The mission of Reach Out and Read is to make books a routine part of pediatric primary care so that children grow up with a love of books and reading, with a special emphasis on children growing up in poverty. The Reach Out and Read model is a scientifically validated model to promote literacy skills beginning at the early age of 6 months. Numerous peer-reviewed research studies demonstrate important positive outcomes when families receive books and guidance through the ROR program. These studies have been carried out in at least 10 different states, with bilingual families, non-English speaking families and families for whom there are no books in the home language, yet the results are the same: Reach Out and Read families are significantly more likely to read to their children and to have more children's books in their homes. Of utmost importance, research documents that children served by the ROR program show an increase of 4-8 points on vocabulary tests by the age of 2. For a two-year-old, this increase represents an approximately six-month gain, developmentally-speaking, preventing the "falling behind" routinely observed and measured in children living in low-income families.

No community interested in the health and welfare of its children can be without Reach Out and Read. Parents need and want guidance about reading with their very young children and they need and want quality children's books. Reach Out and Read fills this need and narrows the gap for the neediest families. The children deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

c/o CT APP ■ 104 Hungerford Street ■ Hartford, Connecticut 06106

TEL: 860-525-9738 ■ FAX: 860-727-9863 ■ WEB: www.reachoutandread.org