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My name is Sandra Carbonari and I am a pediatrician at the St. Mary's Family and Children's Health Center in downtown Waterbury. We have had a Reach Out and Read program at our clinic for 8 years. It has been an unqualified success. It is truly wonderful to see a child's eyes light up when they realize that the brand new book I am showing them is theirs to keep. There are many important issues to discuss during a well child care visit, for instance the child's eating and sleeping habits, development, accident prevention and safety, toilet training, and school readiness to name a few. As a group, our practice has decided to include literacy as a very important issue. The entire staff is involved in the project: looking through catalogs to choose books, completing paperwork for ordering and keeping track of books, applying for grants, unloading shipments of books, soliciting donations, documenting when a child receives a book, etc. I am extremely fortunate because as a pediatrician I get to actually give the book to the child.

It is not unusual for the parent of a new patient to seem puzzled when I begin to ask about books in the home and literacy, especially when the child is a young infant. These discussions can give me insight into the family and their needs which may not be strictly medical, but, nonetheless are important. Being unable to read is not easy to admit to. Through Reach Out and Read the topic is open and we can offer help to parents who want to improve their literacy. During the visit we give parents tips on reading to children of different ages. We care for many families whose primary language is not English or Spanish and stress that the actual words are only one part of reading aloud to young children.

The parents are often as thrilled as the child is with the new book. We sometimes have to stress that these are not "special" items to be put on a shelf, but rather they are for everyday use. The sight of a worn children's book with a few nibble marks is a beautiful thing because it shows that the book is well-loved. We hear over and over at subsequent visits how much the child loves the books we give.

Recently, one of my patients was in for his 4 year old checkup. One of his cousins visiting from another city was with the family. Toward the end of the visit the cousin asked him if I was going to give him a lollipop. My patient answered him with a mixture of disdain and pride, "You don't get lollipops here, you get books!" Reach Out and Read is helping us to instill a love of books and, therefore, improve the literacy of a large number of children. On behalf of my colleagues and patients I urge you to enact bill 7136.