



83 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810

Phone: (203) 797-8088 Fax: 792-7626

Visit us on the internet at <http://www.danburychildrenfirst.org>

February 27, 2007

**Re: Governor Rell's Department of Social Services budget and its implementation**

Dear Senator Harris, Representative Villano and Human Services Committee members,

On behalf of Danbury Children First and the Danbury School Readiness Council, I would urge your support of the following recommendations with regard to the Governor's Department of Social Services budget and its implementation. Our recommendations would increase access to quality childcare and healthcare for children.

1. Increase the funding for Quality Enhancement to School Readiness Councils to at least a fixed 5% of the total School Readiness Funding for childcare slots. This level of funding would bring these Quality Enhancement programs to what they were four years ago. This helps local School Readiness Councils to improve the quality of childcare, and funds are flexible enough for local communities to meet their specific needs. In Danbury, Quality Enhancement opportunities are provided for all childcare providers including centers and home-based day care.
  - Currently, in Danbury we reach over 200 childcare providers each year with training with these funds. With increased funding we could reach many more, and with more intensity.
  - The level of Quality Enhancement funding should follow the School Readiness slot funding level that is provided through the State Department of Education. As more School Readiness slots are provided, local School Readiness Councils want the capacity to provide Quality Enhancement opportunities for greater numbers of childcare professionals. (However, over the past few years, as slots have increased, funding for Quality Enhancement has decreased.)

In addition, we urge your support to create a separate line item for Quality Enhancement in the DSS budget, so that it is no longer a discretionary line item in the Social Services budget.

2. Bring support to childcare staff, such as at State funded centers, so that there is parity on payments for childcare services. This ensures the quality of programming, and would offer staff compensation more aligned with their experience and education. The results would be less staff turnover that can be detrimental to young children, and living wages for childcare staff (many who themselves are supporting families).
3. Increase funding for the Care4Kids program. This childcare subsidy program helps parents to be able to work and helps childcare providers offer services to all families and stay in business. We urge support of the \$90 million to Care4Kids in FY08 in the Governor's budget. This funding would enable:
  - ◆ More childcare availability, and with subsidies set at an appropriate market rate to promote quality, and
  - ◆ Start offering the program to families who make up to 75% of the State's median income. Eventually, when possible, restore funding to at least the 2001-2002 level of \$122 million.

The purpose of Danbury Children First, Inc. is *to involve, empower, and support parents* to improve the lives of children at home, in school and in the community.

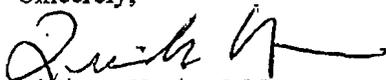
4. We support the Governor's increase in the resources to the HUSKY programs as a step to increase access to health care and urge implementation of the following listed below. These are critical to increased access for children, particularly those of lower economic means.
- ◆ Increase reimbursement rates for physicians, dentists and behavioral health specialists so that more health specialists will participate and more children will have access to services.
  - ◆ Remove co-pays and premiums for HUSKY parents who have incomes between 100 and 150% of the federal poverty level.
  - ◆ Restore continuous eligibility so that fluctuations in family income do not affect access to health care for children.
  - ◆ Restore funding to HUSKY outreach and application assistance to previous levels so that more eligible families are aware of the program and are able to successfully complete the application process. We support additional funding to go to local communities for HUSKY outreach. While we appreciate the Governor's budget increase of \$1.0 million to outreach and the increase in regional DSS office staff, in our community the best access to children was when we had our local outreach program before the cuts to this line item some years ago. We believe that the HUSKY outreach budget should be increased to toward the FY02 level of funding at \$4.4 million. In the Governor's FY08 budget this line item is less than half of the FY02 level.

Danbury Children First is a parent-led organization with over 80 volunteers, members and partners that reaches 9,000 families annually. Danbury Children First works in partnership with the Danbury School Readiness Council that serves over 250 children, and is a member and supporter of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance policy agenda that includes Quality Enhancement and parity for funding State funded centers.

If you would like additional information, please contact me at (203) 797-8088 or at [Lindak@danburychildrenfirst.org](mailto:Lindak@danburychildrenfirst.org).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,



Linda A. Kosko, M.S.

Collaborative Director, Danbury Children First, Inc.

Chair, Public Awareness Committee, Danbury School Readiness Council