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## HEZEKIAH BEARDSLEY CONNECTICUT CHAPTER

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February 20, 2007

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann and Committee members.

I am Jillian Wood, the Executive Director of the CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am here today to discuss 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.

About a year ago, the national organization of Reach Out and Read approached the CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to ask us if we were interested in partnering with them in their expansion work. Knowing the reputation of Reach Out and Read as an evidence-based best practice, and recognizing that there were already 25 locations in the State participating in Reach Out and Read, we knew it was the right thing to do to agree to be its partner.

Reach Out and Read is a wonderful program and is a scientifically validated school readiness model that introduces a new book to children from the ages of 6 months to 5 years old in the structure of the pediatric office, at which parents regularly see their doctors for one-to-one visits focused on the healthy growth and development of children. Within these ages, children are generally seen 10 times for well child visits. Doctors give guidance to parents on how to read to their children in a way that is developmentally appropriate, and send them home with new, carefully chosen, developmentally and culturally appropriate books.

We all know that children unable to read on grade level are at elevated risk for school failure, school drop out, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and criminal activity. Pediatricians feel that whatever we can do to help a child succeed, we will do. Reach Out and Read makes literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric care so that children grow up with books and a love of reading. Armed with strengthened language skills and the intense desire to learn to read, children are better prepared to meet the challenges of school entry.

When National ROR approached us, there were 25 ROR healthcare sites in the State, initiated over an 8 year period. Just one year into our expansion partnership, we now have 35 sites in CT, and several others under development. At those sites, we give books to approximately 23,000 children per year.

The members of the CT AAP are ready and willing to have their practices become official ROR sites. The only thing that is really holding us back from spreading throughout the state is the funds to make it happen. National ROR talks about a three legged stool of funding. To date, we receive funds from the National ROR program, which are federal funds, and are mostly used for books. We also have been fundraising in CT for private funds through foundations and

other opportunities. This obviously will be an on-going process, and one that we believe will be very fruitful.

National ROR is a true public private partnership -- for every public dollar raised; it is matched by at least one private dollar from foundations, corporations and individuals. Reach Out and Read's contribution of federal funding is approximately one third of the CT coalition budget . And, the fiscal conservativeness of the organization is remarkable. 92 cents on every dollar goes directly toward programs, generally in the form of books. It is the only early literacy program to have been awarded 5 stars by Charity Navigator, an independent charity assessor.

We ask today that the State of CT consider investing in this program and becoming a partner with ROR and the pediatric community, and giving each child in the State a better chance at success.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Reach Out and Read trains doctors and nurses to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and to give books to children at pediatric check-ups from six months to five years of age. A special focus is placed on children growing up in poverty. By building on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers, Reach Out and Read helps families and communities cultivate early literacy skills so that children enter school prepared to succeed at reading.*

**Reach  
Out and  
Read®**

National Center



**The Mission ■ Reach Out and Read® makes literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric primary care, so that children grow up with books and a love of reading.**

**Reach Out and Read trains doctors and nurses to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and to give books to children at pediatric check-ups from six months**

**to five years of age, with a special focus on children growing up in poverty. By building on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers, Reach Out and Read helps families and communities encourage early literacy skills so children enter school prepared for success in reading.**

### **The Reach Out and Read (ROR) Model**

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- In the exam room, doctors and nurses trained in the developmental strategies of early literacy encourage parents to read aloud to their young children, and offer age-appropriate tips.
- The pediatric primary care provider gives every child between the ages of 6 months and five years a new, developmentally appropriate children's book to take home and keep.
- In the waiting room, displays, information, and gently used books create a literacy rich environment. Where possible, volunteer readers entertain the children, modeling for the parents the pleasures --and techniques--of reading aloud.

### **The Impact as of January 2006**

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- ROR programs are located in 2,707 hospitals and health centers in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico
- More than 2.3 million children participate in ROR annually
- More than 3.8 million new, developmentally appropriate books are given to families annually
- 40,400 physicians and nurses have been trained in the ROR strategies of early literacy guidance

### **The Challenge**

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- Children who live in print-rich environments and who are read to during the first years of life are much more likely to learn to read on schedule.
- Parents of children living in poverty may lack the money to buy books, may not have easy access to good children's books, and may not themselves have been read to as children, with the result that millions of children are growing up without books.
- Reading difficulty contributes to school failure, which increases the risk of absenteeism, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy – all of which perpetuate the cycles of poverty and dependency.

### **The Reach Out and Read National Center**

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- Reach Out and Read is a national, non-profit organization founded in 1989 at Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center), through a collaboration of pediatricians and early childhood educators.
- Through both public and private funding, the ROR National Center provides start-up and sustainability funding for books, as well as training and technical assistance, to ROR programs nationally.
- Reach Out and Read is affiliated with the Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center, Boston University School of Medicine.
- Reach Out and Read is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

**For more information, contact the Reach Out and Read National Center by phone at (617) 629-8042, email at [info@reachoutandread.org](mailto:info@reachoutandread.org), or by writing to us at 29 Mystic Avenue, Somerville, MA 02145.**

**Visit our web site: [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org)**