



C A F C A

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Testimony provided to the Education Committee

S.B. 1114: An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Regarding Education

Provided by Paul Copes, Director of Education, Community Renewal Team on behalf of the CT Association for Community Action on February 28, 2007

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Paul Copes and I am the Director of Education for the Community Renewal Team and am here today to speak on behalf of the CT Association for Community Action (CAFCA) and submit testimony on the Governor's proposed recommendations regarding early childhood education.

CAFCA is the statewide association of CT's twelve Community Action Agencies (CAAs) which are the federally designated anti-poverty agencies. Community Action Agencies are the largest providers of early childhood education in the state. Last year we served more than 6,300 children through Head Start, Early Head Start, DSS Child Care, and School Readiness.

There is a crisis in our low-income communities, especially our urban areas, because thousands of children are not getting the comprehensive early childhood services they need to succeed in school and in life. We applaud the recommendations of the Governor to substantially increase funding for early childhood education and to equalize the rates between School Readiness and DSS Child Day Care. However, these recommendations are leaving out a vitally important program that is designed specifically to help our most vulnerable low-income families: Head Start.

You previously heard eloquent testimony from a former Head Start parent, Gwen Eaddy, about how effective Head Start was in helping her and her family move out of poverty. Head Start and Early Head Start are both two-generation programs that serve children and parents. They seek to promote positive child development through education, health, dental and other services, and support their parents by promoting the family's self-sufficiency and healthy functioning and providing access to education, job-training activities, and other services.

There is research that demonstrates the education level of the mother strongly correlates with the vocabulary, and therefore the educational success, of the child. Therefore, it only makes sense to invest in programs like Head Start and Early Head Start that work with both the child and the parent to improve educational, life and family outcomes.

CAFCA recommends expanding state Head Start funding by \$10 million over two years and target this to the Community Action Agencies in order to provide the wrap-around services that make Head Start so effective. This proposed increase will provide services to children on the CAA waiting lists (675 children), expand Early Head Start services, and help restore services that have been cut as a result of federal budget cuts and years of flat state funding.

Don't ignore the effectiveness of the Head Start and Early Head Start model. The Perry Preschool Study that researchers use to promote the return-on-investment of early childhood

education is based upon a comprehensive model that included home visitation. It was more similar to Head Start than to any other program. In order to get those benefits the state needs to invest in the right approach, the Head Start approach.

Head Start meets high standards of performance, undergoes a rigorous federal assessment every three years, and reports comprehensive outcome data to the national reporting system. Expanding Head Start is a cost-effective investment because the programs already have the infrastructure, assessment and outcome reporting systems in place.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you for your commitment towards improving the educational outcomes of our low-income children. I've attached additional information and research that supports our position and I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Why Head Start and Early Head Start Works

The success of Head Start and Early Head Start is explained by the vast amount of research conducted on both programs. Head Start and Early Head Start are both two-generation programs that serve children and parents. Head Start and Early Head Start seek to promote positive development in children by providing services to the children, supporting parents in their parenting, and promoting the family's self-sufficiency and healthy functioning by providing access to education and job-training activities and health services.

The 2005 Head Start Impact Study found:

- Statistically significant positive impacts for 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children's literacy skills.
- A higher proportion of Head Start parents read to their children more frequently than those parents of children who were not enrolled in Head Start.
- Head Start centers were rated as having a higher level of classroom quality than other center-based Pre-K classrooms, state-funded Pre-K classrooms and private Pre-K classrooms, as measured by their ECERS-R scores.
- Head Start, for the most part, offers a more comprehensive set of higher quality services than most state Pre-K programs have.

Funding Cuts to Head Start lead to reduced services & long waiting lists:

- Federal Head Start funding was cut by 1%, and with level funding for the previous 6 years, it actually represents a reduction of about 11%.
- **State Head Start funding has been reduced by 19% from 2003 to 2006 when adjusted for inflation.**
- These cuts have had a serious negative impact on our programs. For example one program had to cut the length of the day from 9 hours down to 6, one program went from a 5 day week to a 4 day week, another program had to close classrooms, and almost all programs have had to eliminate transportation, further reducing access to the program.
- All CT Head Start programs have long waiting lists. Currently, CAAs that operate these programs have about 365 children on the waiting list and about 310 infants and toddlers on the waiting list for Early Head Start.

Head Start and Early Childhood Outcomes reported in 2006 by CT CAAs:

- 6,376 children attended quality preschool programs that developed school readiness skills.
- 5,303 children obtained appropriate immunizations and medical care.
- 2,465 children obtained appropriate dental care.
- 6,106 adults demonstrated improved family functioning as a result of counseling and/or classes and other supportive services.

Funding Reductions have already hurt Head Start

Despite these very positive results, federal Head Start funding was recently cut by 1%, and with level funding for the previous 6 years, it actually represents a reduction of about 11%. **State Head Start funding has been reduced by 19% from 2003 to 2006 when adjusted for inflation.** These cuts have had a serious negative impact on our programs. For example one program had to cut the length of the day from 9 hours down to 6, one program went from a 5 day week to a 4 day week, another program had to close classrooms, and almost all programs have had to eliminate transportation. And, of course, with such cuts it is almost impossible for an anti-poverty agency to provide even a basic cost-of-living increase to our Head Start teachers and aides.

We strongly encourage the General Assembly to think carefully about where they allocate limited resources. We believe that resources for pre-K should be focused on proven models like Head Start and Early Head Start that provide comprehensive family services such as dental, health, literacy and parenting skills.

Research confirms the important role that parents play in a child's education. A recent NYT article by Paul Tough (November 26, 2006) summarized this research: Each child's vocabulary was correlated to one factor: the number of words the parents spoke to the child:

- College-educated parents directed an average of 487 "utterances" to their children each hour; welfare children heard 178 utterances per hour.
- There was a large difference by class in the number of "discouragements" a child heard compared with encouragements: by age 3, professionals' children heard about 500,000 encouragements and 80,000 discouragements; welfare children 75,000 encouragements and 200,000 discouragements.
- Researchers found that language exposure in early childhood correlated strongly with IQ and academic success later.
- Middle class parents raise their children differently than poor parents do, giving them many advantages in confidence in later life.

Simply relying on a part-time educational program that has no family development component will not provide the state with the results that are needed. To reduce the significant disadvantages that poor children start with will require a comprehensive approach that works with parents to improve their parenting skills and life prospects. Low-income families need a full-day/full-year, compensatory model for early childhood education, a model such as Head Start and Early Head Start that supports family development, literacy, parenting education, and empowerment. None of the other preschool options available offer this comprehensive approach to breaking the cycle of poverty. That is why we recommend a significant state investment in Head Start and Early Head Start as the most cost-effective approach to achieving the desired results.