

Good afternoon , I am Elizabeth Fraser and I am here on behalf of the Connecticut Even Start programs.

For new members of the Appropriations Committee, Even Start is a federally funded comprehensive family literacy program designed to serve families whose parents need basic adult education services: high school, GED, ESL or basic skills.

Adult Ed programs are the collaborating partners. Even Start requires participating parents to attend adult education while their children are in high quality, NAEYC accredited early education. In order to receive the free childcare, they are required to participate in mentored interactive literacy experiences, parenting classes and a monthly home visit which bring literacy into the home.

We are overseen by the SDE, and are required to have an independent evaluator monitor the progress of the families while they are participating in the Even Start program. We have been very fortunate to have full support from SDE and Commissioner McQuillan, who has advocated for modest state funding to compensate for the ever decreasing federal funding. We have not yet received this despite a strong RBA report card. Only 5 of the original 11 programs are remaining... Next year it may be 4, if indeed we are federally funded at all.

But today I am advocating for families more than for Even Start. The reality that we all find ourselves in is overwhelming and disheartening because all of us here today know who will suffer most from the proposed cuts and flat funding..... the families that are struggling more and more each day just to get by.

We at Even Start are realists:

We work with the reality of parents who never reached their potential in our public schools, sometimes from their own issues but frankly more often because the schools failed them from a very early age. These early failures and learned mistrust of schools can become a predictor of their future success. Without change in perception, this legacy of failure is easily passed on to the next generation.

We work with the reality of more and more families who are homeless or teetering on the edge of homelessness. Yet our families come to school each day, child in tow, to attend their classes. Please know that many might not be counted as homeless because they spend nights at friend's homes, going from place to place with their children...there is just not enough shelter space and housing to go around.

We work with the reality of families who are food insecure.

We work with the reality of families who face confusion over their children's ever changing Husky benefits and do not have coverage themselves.

We work with the reality of families who can not find or afford quality childcare for their infants and toddlers so they can find a job, work and support themselves or continue their education after completing their adult education program.

We work with the reality that many of the parents we are educating have seen and heard more as children than many of us have been exposed to in our lives and they do not always have easy access to the mental health services they need to cope with these early images, not to mention with ever increasing daily struggles.

We work with the reality of families navigating a time consuming social service system that is more about paperwork than people.

Even Start families are representative of all families in this state caught in this quagmire. Imagine, you have had many obstacles in your life and just start making small progress, wanting more for your own children, working and going to school so that your children will be better off. several part-time jobs, transportation issues, housing issues, health issues, food issues ...and then once again the rug is pulled out from under you...fewer jobs available and fewer supports, Frankly far less would send many of us over the edge.....

Yes, we are realists, we are working with the reality that there is not enough money to go around ... and this means that some of the bright lights at the end of the tunnel for these families will be cut. Care for Kids, School Readiness, Adult Education, Family Resource Centers, the list goes on and on...(Remember that even flat funding means cut!!)

As educators of both adults and children, we are asking you to take steps to ensure that the impact on our Connecticut's struggling families will be minimal.

- Continue to fully fund the education of our adults who never completed their high school educational goals. They will not even be able to find any work, be productive members of society and provide for their own children without high school or equivalency.
- Continue to educate our children ...Don't skimp on this!! There may be many things we can wait two years for... but as you know, research shows that for every year that we under fund early childhood programs we will have to pay for many times over in the future.
- Fund child care/Care for Kids for eligible parents who are searching for work or attending school....they can't find a job if they don't have child care!
- Continue to work to find a solution to providing *accessible* health care for children and parents. Unhealthy parents can not take care of their children.

And finally I would be remiss if I did not advocate for modest Even Start funding to supplement our programs meager federal funds.

Even Start addresses many of the needs of fragile families by providing not only education for both parent and child but by collaborating with other agencies to address the very real needs of each individual (adult and child) as a whole. We believe that it is only when we address the needs of a whole person we become whole.

Our thoughts will be with you as you work to find creative ways to work through these very difficult times.