



# EDUCATION CONNECTION

A Regional Educational Service Center

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To: Appropriations Committee  
From: Janae Peluso  
Re: Parent Fees/DDS  
Date: February 18, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Janae Peluso.

I speak to you today in support of the families in the state of Connecticut whose children need early intervention services. I strongly support the increased allocation for Birth to Three in the proposed FY 2011 budget – this will ensure ongoing services for the children.

EDUCATION CONNECTION, the regional educational service center in western CT, operates the SEED and TLC programs that provide early intervention services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and autism. Last year we provided services to over 400 families in the western part of the state. I am here today to speak about the recent changes to the Parent Fee structure within the CT Birth to Three Program that is preventing families from accessing needed services for their young children.

Birth to Three services are provided primarily in the home with the parent or caregiver present and participating in the service. Birth-to-Three has a documented positive impact on the child's development and on the family. Approximately 11% of the children who participate in the program are able to reach age appropriate milestones by the time they are three years old and, therefore, do not need special education services by the age of three. Others show significant developmental growth and require fewer interventions once they enter the school setting.

Since 2004, families have been required to pay a fee for early intervention services if they earn more than \$45,000 per year. The sliding fee is based upon income and family size. As of January 1<sup>st</sup> this year, the fee has been increased by 60%. As an example, a family of three with a family adjusted gross income between \$85 and 95,000, which is CT's median income, pays \$120 per month. Additionally, families are asked permission to bill their insurance carrier for services. If families refuse to provide access to their insurance, the parent fee is doubled, i.e. \$240 a month.

When a family does not pay the fee, direct services for the child are discontinued. Currently enrolled families were informed of this new change during November and December of last year. Many parents expressed their concerns about the decision that they had to make: whether to pay the increase in parent fees or buy groceries for their family. As a result of the increased fee, during the month of January, our programs have already witnessed a 10% decrease in family participation. This represents 10 children not receiving needed services. If this is multiplied by the 45 other providers in the state, this would mean that 450 children who have already been evaluated and assessed to be significantly delayed, are no longer receiving early intervention services. This makes no sense.

Families have now lost early interventionists coming to their home, working with their child and educating and supporting the parent as they cope with their child's challenges. The loss of these services will continue to have a significant impact on the development of these children. They will have lost months or years of critical direct intervention that would have supported their developmental growth. When these children turn three years old, they are likely to show up on a school district's steps requiring special education services. This will have a direct impact on the school district's special education costs.

The Birth to Three mission statement ensures that all children have equal access to a coordinated program of comprehensive services. Many Birth to Three providers have suggested other options to decrease costs that would not have a direct impact on the child and family. These are challenging fiscal times. Please consider alternative ways to address the budget deficit that does not result in children and families losing Birth to Three services. These children and families truly need early intervention services now.

Thank You.