

***Testimony of Colleen Brennan in support of increased funding for the Family Resource Centers within the Department of Education budget, offered to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education on February 21, 2012.***

"It takes a village to raise a child" is an often-quoted African proverb, which epitomizes many families' experiences with the AHM Resource Center. The Family Resource Center Coordinator and Parent Educator have created an invaluable resource of knowledge and support to families in my community. To reduce funding of the Family Resource Center Grant from the CT State Department of Education would jeopardize the availability of these benefits to thousands of Connecticut families.

As new parents, my husband and I often joked about wishing we'd come home from the hospital with an owner's manual for our babies. With a Master's Degree in Elementary Education, I'd certainly considered myself well prepared for motherhood. Upon the arrival of our first son, we quickly realized we had a lot to learn.

We read numerous books about newborns and toddlers only to discover that our child was not always in the book. We had lots of questions. I was also struggling with transitioning from a busy career to a Stay at Home mom. I wondered how Stay at Home mothers got through their days. We had lots of friends with children to whom we asked these questions but most of these children were older and the parents could no longer remember the details of how they'd handled the parenting issues in question. Too much time had passed and they were focused on new and different developmental issues. One piece of advice I did hear repeatedly: "AHM Play and Learn."

The AHM Play and Learn and Discussion Groups are the answer. We now have two young children and I've been attending Play and Learn and Discussion groups for almost five years. The Family Resource Center Coordinator and Parent Educator have years of experience and training with regard to issues families face and are therefore extremely knowledgeable. This is a place to learn from and share with families with children of the same age. During the newborn and toddler years, it was my place to brainstorm, learn and practice new parenting skills such as feeding, sleep, communication, discipline, routines, sharing and potty training.

As my boys entered Preschool, I found the AHM Play and Learn group to be the perfect place to introduce and reinforce many skills necessary for the classroom. The structure of Play and Learn includes side-by-side play, cooperative play, circle time, transitions and snack time. It is here that I'm currently helping my youngest learn to solve conflicts directly with peers using appropriate strategies and to initiate appropriate requests to be included in play.

The AHM Play and Learn Group is a community of families that support each other with issues facing young families. When now asked how I found solutions to early childhood parenting issues, my response is usually from someone I met in association with the AHM Resource Center. Friends from towns without a Family Resource Center marvel at my good fortune of having such a valuable and available resource. In many ways, the AHM Resource Center is "the modern day village it takes to raise a FAMILY." I respectfully request that the Legislators NOT reduce funding for Family Resource Center programming in the Department of Education budget.

Respectfully,

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*The AHM Family Resource Center offers Play and Learn Groups for parents and their children ages birth to 5. Groups include developmentally appropriate activities for school readiness, such as crafts, socialization, snack, and circle time with stories and songs. Information and handouts on a variety of topics relating to raising children are available to parents, along with consultation with the Parent Educator. We offer a comfortable, fun setting for parents and kids to learn and meet new friends!*