



**Testimony Presented to the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly  
March 5, 2012**

Senator Andrea Stillman, Representative Andrew Fleischman, and members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on two bills today – *R.B. 5350, An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy By Grade Three* and *R.B.300, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education*.

*R.B. 5350, An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy By Grade Three*, compiles important strategies for improving literacy by focusing on kindergarten through grade three, but the most important set of strategies are missing – those that address literacy from birth to age five. Building a solid foundation in oral language and early literacy are essential to creating successful readers and no literacy plan should ignore this age group. In Middletown, we are fortunate to have our Adult Education Even Start Early Literacy program which works with children ages birth to three and their parents to develop their oral language and early literacy skills. It is a program that we value highly as it supports our lowest income families in building a strong literacy foundation for their children. It is one example of what must be done to help all children read on grade level by third grade. We know that starting in kindergarten is simply too late – the preparation gap has already begun. We would also encourage you to include a high-quality course in developing young children's oral language and literacy skills to be included in the Early Childhood Teacher Credential outlined in P.B. 11-54. It would be important, too, to include this as a requirement for all home visitors that work with families with very young children.

We support the intent of *R.B.300, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education*, which lays out a plan to phase in universal access to high quality preschool in Connecticut by 2018. We view preschool as one of the most important strategies for closing the achievement gap in our state and are sure that you are aware of the mountains of research pointing to its educational and economic benefits. Although we appreciate that the governor has included 500 new preschool spaces in his budget, this will not go far enough in addressing the issue. We also understand that these are very difficult economic times and that this proposal is probably too aggressive in the current economy. We do, though, encourage you to develop and implement an affordable, longer term plan to provide all of Connecticut's low-income preschoolers an educational opportunity prior to kindergarten. We believe that it is one of the best investments that you can make.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on these bills today and for your thoughtful consideration of our views.

## **The Middletown School Readiness Council**

Daniel Drew, Mayor

Dr. Michael J. Frechette, Superintendent of Schools

Betsy Morgan, Council Chair, Middlesex Coalition for Children

Rev. Robyn Anderson, A.M.E. Zion Church

Monica Belyea, Parent

Wendy Berlind, Grandparent

Ed Bonilla, Middlesex United Way

Sheila Daniels, Board of Education

Lisa Ellis, Director, CRT Head Start Program

Alice Ellovich, Dept. of Social Services

Christine Fahey, School Readiness Coordinator

Elizabeth Fraser, Adult Education Even Start Program

James Gaudreau, Principal, Wilbert Snow School

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Cat Greaves, Director, Family Resource Centers

Beverly Lawrence, CT Parent Power

Dr. Jerome Long, Grandparent

Susan Macary, Parent

Donna Marino, Community Partnership Coordinator

Dr. Cliff O'Callahan, Pediatrician, Middlesex Family Medicine Residency Program

Christine O'Grady, Child FIRST, Middlesex Hospital

Courtney Perales, Student Intern, Mercy High School

Ann Perzan, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education

Kitty Robinson, Children's Department Head, Russell Library

Dr. Robert Rosenbaum, Chair, PIMMS, Wesleyan University

Susan Sienkiewicz, Dept. of Children and Families

Dr. Alice Torres, Area Cooperative Education Services, Early Head Start