

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for After School Programs and Care 4 Kids Funding

February 21, 2013

Submitted by Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director, YWCA New Britain

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director of the YWCA New Britain, an agency serving more than 400 children and their families in New Britain through School Readiness, After School, Family Literacy, and Adult Education.

I am testifying on behalf of the children served in New Britain; many of whom start school far behind peers in more affluent towns and stay behind throughout their school career. As many of you may know, New Britain is one of the state's lowest performing school districts. Most recent graduation data indicates only 55% of the city's students graduate from school in 4 years. The rate is even lower (43%) for Latino students.

Participation in both School Readiness Programs which give young children an early access to education and the additional time spent in educationally supportive after school programs are critically important to the educational success of low income students.

Both national, and local research, supports this. Yet local research also indicates that not every child has access to either Early Childhood opportunities (80%) or after school (only 1 in 4 local children).

Yet some aspects of the Governor's proposed budget put these programs in jeopardy.

Funding for After School has been stripped from the state budget. New Britain receives this support to provide after school programming for both elementary and middle school youth. More than 200 children are currently served by providers through these funds. There are no local resources that could replace the state dollars being lost to support after school opportunities for children in the city.

Loss of these funds indicate increased numbers of children will go home to empty homes while parents are at work; will not be able to access academic enrichment programs that support school learning; and (particularly at the middle school level) are at increased risk of participating in activities that put them at risk.

Care 4 Kids funding is being restricted to families with incomes less than 50% of the state median income. This has been done before, the result negatively impacts school readiness providers, like the YWCA, who serve large numbers of low and moderate income families (90%), and rely on Care 4 Kids to supplement the state School Readiness funds. School Readiness programming was always predicated on funding from three complementary sources-grant funds, parent fees, and Care 4 Kids funding. The per child cost to provide this service is more than \$11,000 per year. Care 4 Kids dollars are critically important to programs, like ours, in which parents pay less than \$20/week on average. There is no way to make up for lost Care 4 Kids revenue. Our experience several years ago when the program was restricted, was a loss of \$15,000 over less than a six month period. For non-profits who operate on razor thin margins, incurring this type of loss over a sustained period is not

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possible and it makes it impossible to meet the rigorous requirements of School Readiness Programming.

Please consider re-instating After School funding and eliminate the restriction on Care 4 Kids eligibility.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this matter.