

February 14, 2013

Dear Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischman and Members of the Education Committee:

As the Director of Rehabilitation Associates of Connecticut, Inc (one of the general Birth to Three programs) and ABC Intervention (one of the Autism Specific Programs) I wish to comment on HB 6349, the bill to create an Office of Early Childhood that would improve coordinate services between early childhood programs. I also serve as Fiscal Co-Chair for the State Interagency Coordinating Council and our mission is to assist the lead agency for Birth to Three, as needed.

Rehabilitation Associates of Connecticut, Inc has been providing Birth to Three services to the State when the State Board of Education was the Lead Agency and we have continued to provide services during the entire time that the Department of Developmental Services has provided an efficient, family focused program to children with disabilities and their families within the state.

I welcome the Governor's efforts to consolidate Early Childhood services in our State. I would hope that the transition to the Office of Early Childhood considers the specific efforts of the Department of Developmental Services to make Birth to Three a quality program that provides services in the most cost effective manner.

1. Programs receive reimbursement only for those services directly received by families.
2. Medicaid rates have been extremely favorable to the State General Fund. It would be very important to make every effort to make sure that move to a new lead Agency does not affect this positive revenue stream. This will require changes to the State Medicaid plan and may require new Medicaid regulations.
3. The RFP in 2012 was a vigorous effort to grant contracts to those agencies that would provide the best services to our most vulnerable infants and toddlers. Both programs and agency staff spent many months in this process. It is hoped that these 'quality' programs continue to provide services under the new 'Office of Early Childhood' (without interruption). I would recommend that there be a clause in the legislation, as there was in 1995, to maintain the same provider network that was selected in the RFP process for at least 5 years in order to maintain existing quality programming for children and families.
4. Change can be very positive. However we need to proceed in an orderly fashion in order to ensure a positive transition to the new lead agency. The 1995 Legislative Program Review and Investigation Report would certainly be an excellent framework to serve as the model for necessary steps and timelines to follow in order to have a successful transition from the present Lead Agency to the Office of Early Childhood.

If there are any questions and/or additional information that you need you can email m.watnick@rehabassocinc.com or call me (203) 332-4383 and I would be more than happy to respond to your inquiries.

Myra Watnick, Director – Rehabilitation Associates of Connecticut, Inc

