



Testimony of Anthony DiLauro, Executive Director, Read to Grow
and Christine Garber, Program Director, Reach Out and Read

Governor's Bill No. HB 6359: An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishmann and members of the Committee, HB 6359 will be an improvement for everyone in the early childhood system, most importantly for children and families.

This proposal, including an Office of Early Childhood that reports directly to the Governor, will give early childhood services and programs the focus and attention they deserve. This creates one place for the coordination and delivery of early childhood services. By coordinating in one agency, the state will be able to identify gaps in services and make informed and uniform policy decisions.

The current delivery of early childhood services is fragmented over many agencies, making it confusing for parents and inefficient for service providers. The Office of Early Childhood will move early childhood programs from five agencies: the State Department of Education, Department of Social Services, Department of Public Health, Department of Developmental Services, and the Board of Regents. This will reduce the fragmentation and thereby simplify the process of ensuring that all programs and services are of the highest quality and families have information and access to these services.

Research shows that investing in early childhood saves dollars and resources in the future. Currently, with programs in several different agencies, early childhood is not getting the focus needed to achieve the maximum return on investment.

It is our hope that with the creation of the Office of Early Childhood: Read to Grow and Reach Out and Read can help provide services as part of a continuum to needy children; supplying parents with important literacy information, reinforcing the importance of reading aloud during critical stages of development from birth to five, providing new and gently used books.

Read to Grow, and Reach Out and Read collaboratively reach approximately 60,000 children and families annually, providing critical literacy information through visits with trained volunteers in the hospitals and through pediatricians at well child visits. Read to Grow, and Reach Out and Read combined supply more than 200,000 books to children and parents who can not afford to purchase books of their own. Read to Grow, and Reach out and Read look forward to becoming a closer partner with the State through the Office of Early Childhood to engage parents as their child's first teacher and ensure they have appropriate books to read.

The creation of the Office of Early Childhood is the result of a very impressive and commendable effort of study and outreach completed by the Early Childhood Planning Team and its leader, Myra Jones-Taylor. Thanks to their dedicated efforts, everyone in early childhood - parents, teachers, programs, administrators- were a part of the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.