

February 13, 2013

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

I am writing this letter in regards to HB 6359 , the bill to create an Office of Early Childhood to coordinate early childhood programs and services. This bill will enact the details of Governor Malloy's early childhood plan which includes the Birth to Three program being transferred to the new office effective 7/1/14.

I applaud Governor Malloy's establishment of the Office of Early Childhood and its mission to provide a comprehensive, collaborative system for delivering programs and services to children ages zero to five and their parents.

I am the owner and director of Children's Therapy Services and a member of the Birth To Three Interagency Coordinating Council as well as the Birth To Three provider representative on the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council. Children's Therapy Services has been a comprehensive provider of Birth To Three services in this state since its inception. We initially had a contract with the Department of Education when they were lead agency and subsequently with the Department of Developmental Services when the lead agency changed.

Birth To Three has been through many changes in system models and lead agencies but at this time it is a very efficient and effective system . The finance of the program and the highly trained, consistent workforce has made this program successful and it is vital that these issues be addressed in the planning of the transfer of Birth To Three to the Office of Early Childhood

1. In the early fall of 2011, DDS issued an RFP for comprehensive birth to three programs as well as specific programs for children with autism and for children with hearing impairments. This was a very rigorous, competitive process. On July 1, 2012, 35 comprehensive programs , 6 autism specific programs and three hearing specialty program were awarded new five year contracts (six existing programs were not selected for new contracts but they continue to provide services to children enrolled until those children age out). The providers have well-trained staff knowledgeable in the provision of Birth To Three services for children with special needs and their families. It is important to maintain a stable provider network for children and families enrolled in the system on July 1, 2014. Since this was also a concern in 1995 when the lead agency changed from the Department of Education to the Department of Developmental Services, there was a clause in the legislation that maintained the provider network for five years in order to provide continuity and stability for the children with special needs and families enrolled in the system. I recommend that similar language be added to this legislation for those agencies that were selected in the RFP process for new contracts.
2. Unlike most of the programs being transferred to this new agency, Birth To Three is an entitlement program. Budgeting for entitlement programs is always tricky! However DDS has implemented many cost-containment policies and procedures

that help to make Birth To Three an efficient system. For example programs are only paid for services actually provided to children and families similar to a capitated “fee for service” system rather than a “grant system” DDS/ Birth To Three have systems in place that maximize Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement revenue. These revenue streams as well as budget support from DDS through the transfer of funds when needed has been crucial to Birth To Three’s financial picture. The Office of Early Childhood will need to invest time and attention to look at the ways in which revenue is collected for Medicaid and private insurance and develop state regulations that support the Office’s ability to bill Medicaid and utilize these other funding streams. It will take careful planning to be sure to have these systems in place on July 1, 2014.

Thank-you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at (203) 217-0591 if further information or clarification is needed.

Sincerely,

Cindy Jackson, Director

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