

Children Committee
Public Hearing
February 14, 2013

Representative Urban and other members of the committee

My name is Mary Burnham and I have been involved in early childhood education for over 35 years. I have lived in Newtown CT for almost 40 years.

Years ago, I was a kindergarten teacher in the Westport CT public schools and for 19 years I was the Director of a State Funded Childcare Center in New Milford CT. I care deeply about a child's early years.

You have several bills before you regarding mental health. A number of these bills deal with ages Birth-5 which is most positive because prevention saves lives and money!

We know that the first 1000 days of life are crucial to a human's mental health. Mental health intervention is currently NOT available for many of our very young children - infants and toddlers. For these children, services must include families, and at the present time, there are few clinicians who can assist with pre-verbal children.

I cannot tell you how many times as the director of an early childhood center I asked for help with a child who had behavioral problems and was asked, "Are these problems affecting their learning? Does he/she know their numbers, colors, or letters?" In early childhood letters and numbers are one area of learning, but social and emotional is probably the most important area of development!

CT early childhood programs should have available FUNDED, trained, and educated therapists. We see problems EARLY. Although it is important that pediatricians be trained to recognize difficulties and assist families in accessing services, early childhood teachers actually observe children in natural settings and for longer periods of time. Therefore, it is most important that these teachers be trained to recognize difficulties and assist families in accessing services. Insurance should cover mental health services and therapists must be encouraged to serve those children.

Prevention at the early ages can avoid intervention at the later ages. Prevention just might stop killings and suicides.

Parents and families must have access to mental health services.

If needed, every child and family in Connecticut from birth through adulthood should have access to mental health services - regardless of the child's residence, whether it is a small town, a city, or a rural area - and regardless of a family's income - rich, poor, or in-between.

Again, prevention is far more cost effective than intervention. I encourage you to examine the availability and affordability of programs that assist families before mental health concerns reach the level where an individual harms him/herself or others. We are focused now because of the tragic event on 12/14, but we must also remember the number of individuals who self-medicate or commit suicide, or those who are struggling because of other mental health problems.

Once again, I beg you to FUND mental health for early childhood - include birth to age 5.

Thank you for your attention to these difficult matters.

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