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Testimony in support of the Help Me Grow Program  
Office of Early Childhood Budget

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Faith Vos Winkel, I am a social worker and an Assistant Child Advocate with the Office of the Child Advocate. Laura Amenta and I co-chair a public-private partnership established per the requirements of Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act for the advancement of child abuse prevention.

I am here today to respectfully request that the funding for the Help Me Grow Program (HMG), and the point of entry for this program at 211 be fully restored in the state budget. I recognize the enormous task and challenge before you to balancing our State budget. However, the HMG program has a significant positive impact on children and families in our state.

Prevention and early intervention programs and supports are critical for the growth and development of our youngest children. In Connecticut, we are so fortunate to have developed the HMG program. We are proud to say that HMG is not only an evidence based model for children and families in our state, but is being replicated across this country. Because of the innovation of leaders like Dr. Paul Dworkin and others, nearly half the States are implementing the HMG model.

The adoption of the HMG model by 24 states, clearly demonstrates the importance of this type of support and early intervention for children and families. The positive impact on the developmental trajectories as well as the long term health and well-being of children has been demonstrated not only in our state but across the country. We know from the Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES), exposure to even a single adverse childhood experience can contribute to poor health in childhood that can effect the overall physical and mental health as an adult. Programs like HMG help reduce the numbers of children who are experiencing poor health and educational outcomes.

The HMG program is a best practice program for children and families at risk for developmental delays and behavioral challenges. This model is predicated on five protective factors (1) parental resilience (2) social connection (3) knowledge of parenting and child development (4) concrete supports in times of needs and (5) social and emotional competence of children. These are the 5 necessary ingredients to effectively strengthen families and optimize the growth and development of young children.

"Since the inception of CT HMG in 2002, thousands of parents in Connecticut needing help with their children have called Child Development Infoline/HMG with questions about a developmental or behavioral problem (University of Hartford, Center for Social Research, 2012)". The 2012 HMG Report Card indicated that there were 3,225 referrals to service programs. We know this program is cost effective from a budgetary perspective, and far more importantly minimizing more expensive interventions later in childhood and adulthood.

While there is no doubt that our state continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to early childhood programs and services; eliminating the HMG is not an investment in the future of Connecticut children. This program has demonstrated results for children and families I urge you to reinstate HMG in our state budget. Our state needs to continue leadership with this model program.

*Faith Vos Winkel, MSW*

Respectful Submitted,

Faith Vos Winkel, MSW & Laura Amenta

Co-Chairs Prevention Partners For Children

