



Testimony to Appropriations Committee

Respectfully Submitted by Dr. Darcy Lowell, Founder & CEO of Child First
March 3rd, 2015

Good evening Senator Bye and Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name Dr. Darcy Lowell, Founder & CEO of Child First, an evidence-based, two-generation, early childhood intervention serving Connecticut's most vulnerable young children and their families.

Child First provides a mental health intervention for both parents and children together, while wrapping comprehensive services and supports around all members of the family. Our interventions are particularly directed towards vulnerable young children from birth through 5 years of age, who are experiencing multiple challenges in their environments, such as **maternal depression, child trauma, domestic violence, substance abuse, or homelessness**. We know from the research on "toxic stress" and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that this type of chronic stress damages the developing brain leading to long term disability in child mental health, learning, and physical health. Finding these children and **intervening early** can prevent these very negative outcomes, saving our state millions of dollars.

Currently, there are 15 Child First affiliate program sites serving 1,000 children and their families, covering 48% of Connecticut's towns. Five full Child First sites and three expansion sites receive funding through the 2012 Competitive Federal Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. (Nine of our sites are funded through the Department of Children and Families and one through Project LAUNCH.) The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) receives funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which is then passed to Child First National Program Office, and to the eight Child First sites. We are extremely pleased that the OEC has been awarded a \$10.5 million grant to fund very important expansion of both Child First and Parents as Teachers program. (This is entirely new funding, and does not sustain existing sites.) Through these funds, Child First will be able to expand our programs in Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury, all cities with extremely high need.

However, we are deeply concerned about the eight sites who have received 2012 Competitive MIECHV funding, because this funding will be totally expended by December 2015. There is no new funding allocated to these affiliate sites, and we are extremely concerned that if Congress does not re-authorize the MIECHV program (with a vote expected by March 31st), these programs will have to close, effective December 31st, 2015. This would mean 350 children and their families each year would be without urgently needed services from Child First.

We wanted to be sure that the members of the Appropriations Committee were fully aware of this potential funding gap, and urge you to work with the Office of Early Childhood to develop and implement alternate funding strategies to ensure these programs are able to continue their essential work on behalf of children and families.

Thank you so much for your attention to this critical matter.

Respectfully, Darcy Lowell MD

