



**State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Commission on Children**



**Testimony of Elaine Zimmerman  
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**Appropriations Sub Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
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Senator Bye, Representative Gonzales and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee,

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children. I am here this morning to discuss the Governor's proposed budget recommendations and the work of the Commission on Children.

We understand the current budget climate and are glad to work as a team to absorb the bulk of the recommended cuts. The proposed budget allocates \$923,140 in 2016 and \$971,737 in 2017 with recommended cuts of \$163,637 in 2016 and \$208,200 in 2017. We ask that the reductions instead be \$133,637 in 2016 and \$178,200 in 2017, to absorb additional lapses, assure resources for the two-generational work that Connecticut is leading the states in, and to support an office secretary at three quarter time.

The General Assembly created the Commission on Children through Section 46a-126 of the General Statutes with bipartisan support. We are mandated to advance public policies in the best interest of children. In our work, we 1) develop landmark policies for children, 2) bring dollars and donated skills to the state, 3) lead in public information for children and youth, 4) perform key research on children's needs, 5) bring the family to government and government to the family, and 6) are recognized as the best coordinating entity for children in the nation (The Family Impact Seminar).

Children, are the only investment in our state, no matter what, that just keeps on growing. Their growth is Connecticut's growth. For this reason, the Commission strives to innovate, raise dollars, bolster parents' skills, assure best practices and highlight accountability for children. We speak for children, galvanizing resources, constituents and unexpected stakeholders to make sure children thrive.

The Commission performs the following functions for the state and its children:

## Entrepreneurs for Children and Families

Our agency brings in significant dollars to the state for children and their families. Over the last two years, we brought in \$ 562,700 in external dollars to support community programs and policies for children and youth. This is roughly equivalent to 82% of our current annual budget.

For every dollar you invest in our budget, we bring in 48% of that from the private sector. These dollars do not come to our agency but go into the community for program and policy. It is our on-going commitment to always seek public private partnerships for children and their families.

Examples of funds garnered to move policy and family in CT:

- Family engagement – The Kellogg Foundation (\$140,000) has continued to give us funds for our work in parent leadership. Because this work has been evaluated and reflects significant gains in family involvement, particularly across cultures and income levels, Kellogg funds components of the CT work and national replication. This includes funds for Hartford as a model family engagement city, Spanish translation, and research on how school leaders can best engaged with families.
- The Casey Foundation has given us \$50,000 to bring the best practice models in family leadership together in Washington so that national policy leaders and funders can learn from best practices.
- Literacy in pre-kindergarten through third grade (\$880,000) – In partnership with Literacy How, we worked with the Grossman Family Fund to test new reading assessment tools for teachers that would offer more data and immediate intervention strategies. These funds also paid for classroom coaching, teacher training in assessment and intervention and parent classes on partnering with schools in literacy. This work informed the reading interventions now being adopted by our State Department of Education. The Grossman Family Fund is now contributing \$800,000 a year to Norwalk for this model to expand city-wide.
- Jobs – We partnered with Liberty Bank Foundation (\$100,000) to test the viability of a fund, entitled the WorkPath Fund, so that families could find work or sustain an existing job during and after the recession. The fund, aligned with the Legislature’s employment goals, will likely bring in another \$120,000 this coming year and significantly more than that, in blocking job loss.
- We partner with Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation on school climate and social and emotional skills building for students. This year her foundation partnered with us on a forum with youth on state climate. She is now working with us to create youth ambassadors for safe schools. Throughout collaboration with the Born This Way Foundation and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, the Foundation has

contributed thousands of dollars in in-kind staff time to our work toward improving school climate in the state.

- Two-generational policy, The Aspen Institute (\$10,000) – We partner with the Aspen Institute on two-generational policy. They have agreed to bring states together to support a learning community between the states.

## **Model Policy Design**

We staff the Legislature on policies that have been the first of their kind or model laws for the states.

### **Two-Generational**

The Commission worked with the Co-Chairs of the Appropriations Committee to create a two-generational plan for our state. The goal of two-generational policies is family economic stability through quality learning for the child, pathways to work for the parent and related support services. Bureaucracy is scaled back and parent and child are in the front row of service.

This work has led to partnership with the Aspen Institute. They are distributing our legislation, our product, deploying technical assistance as needed to our state and also bringing a training academy together of Colorado and Connecticut the first two states to move state policy in two-generational thinking.

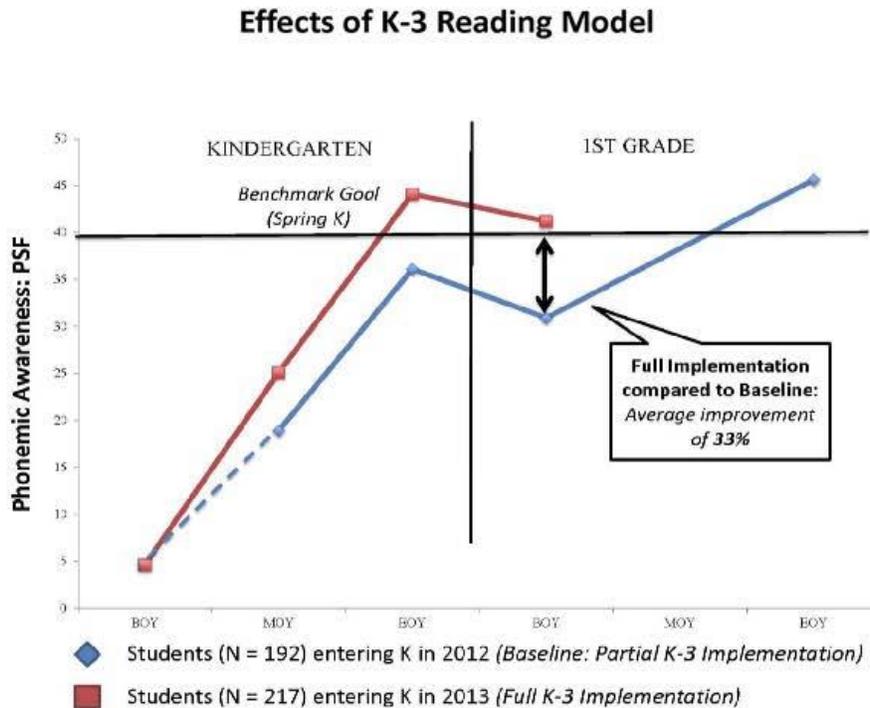
I am pleased to also inform you that the Deputy Secretary of the Federal Administration of Children and Families has just requested permission to distribute our state plan on two-generational policy and practice within their agency as a model for what states can do.

### **Reading**

The Commission researched, worked with national scholars and drafted comprehensive literacy language for and with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus. This included a new assessment instrument, teacher training, coaches, and state requirements for a professional development plan, particular reading intervention requirements to disallow disproportionate referrals of children of color to special education, and intensive intervention with individualized reading plans for every student k-3, who was not reading at proficiency.

This work is being replicated through philanthropy in all of Norwalk. Naugatuck, as an entire district, is using their Alliance grant money to continue this initial work in all of their elementary schools. East Haven is also using the model throughout their district. The Alliance districts are now using parts of this strategy and training model.

Below, you will see a 30% improvement in reading skills.



As the chart above shows, students in 4 of the pilot schools who have received multiple years of the K-3 Reading Model demonstrate greater literacy growth and achievement than students who received fewer years of the K-3 Reading Model – so effects are cumulative over time.

Analyses were conducted on 4 Pilot Schools who have been participating in the K-3 Reading Model pilot since the 2012-2013 school year: (1) Burns, Hartford, (2) Truman, New Haven, (3) Norris, East Hartford, and (4) Windham Center, Windham.

\*Note summer learning loss between the end of the year (EOY) and beginning of the year (BOY).++

## Mental Health

Our agency brought together early childhood and childhood experts, after Newtown, to assess what could be done to decrease the possibility of violent disasters, born from mental illness. We drafted a bill for the Senate that offered a comprehensive children’s mental health system. The bill included the consolidation of home visitation and early childhood, which has occurred.

Other components included a) professional development of early childhood providers and pediatricians in the prevention and early identification of mental health problems, b) an early intervention system in assessment of mental health challenges for children with full utilization of federal EPSDT requirements in screening and assessment, c) formalized partners and referrals to mental health practitioners in the Birth to Three system, d) strong review of referrals to

corrections for mental health cases, e) expansion of trauma informed interventions and practices, f) training of school resource officers to assure proven and proper response with minimal over or under referrals based on demographics, and g) information for parents on signs of child development and how to tell if your child would benefit from mental health intervention.

## **Innovators**

We innovate new practice where the gap is too large and nothing has filled it. Examples include:

### **Family Civics**

When it was clear that families were not part of government and government did not reach families, we designed the first family civics initiative for parents in the country, called the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI). This initiative gives parents the tools and confidence to be voices for children in their schools, communities and state. Over the past decade:

- PLTI graduates have generated \$1.1 million in volunteer time.
- We were invited to the White House this past July to showcase our successful parent leadership work and explore how to measure and replication quality family engagement.
- PLTI was recognized by Congress as one of the top ten innovative practices in all the states and was honored by the Ford Foundation and Good Housekeeping Magazine.
- The model has gone statewide and is now being replicated in 17 other states.

### **Disaster and Children**

Most think that child safety is about child protection from family harm. Our agency works on child safety in the context of community violence, disaster and mental health. The Commission wrote the first state legislation in the nation to assure protections for children in times of natural or unnatural disaster. We worked with partners to create the cross-branch, cross-agency Committee on Children and Disaster in homeland security, particularly concerned with assuring all first responders were prepared to evacuate children and youth. It was the Commission on Children's work on children and terrorism that led to Congress' national entity on Children and Disaster in Washington, DC.

We work with partners to guide pilot trainings by local emergency responders for day care providers; created "injects" for the Governor's annual emergency exercise, to drive all localities in our state to consider children in their disaster planning; created a checklist in English and Spanish for use by local disaster shelters, in times of summer and winter storms and other emergencies, to ensure the needs of children are incorporated into shelter operations; link

United Way 211 Child Care and local emergency responders across our state; and bring best practices and resources for children in times of disaster.

### **Scholars on Best Research and Practices**

The Commission performs research to address gaps, understand trends, and forecast policy needs for children. For example, we analyzed:

- Best practices of two-generational policy and program and what a state can do systemically to embed two-generational practices.
- The impact of 9/11 and Katrina on the children in our state. This research went national as the most in-depth study of natural and unnatural disaster on children. It was used by Congress and in our state and led to the only legislation in the nation on children and unnatural disaster.
- How long children were waiting in foster care for adoption. These findings propelled our state's comprehensive adoption bill.
- Methods to reduce concussions among our young sports players in informal settings to promote best practice and safety.
- The impact of racial integration in the early years on children's notion of difference. This led to strong integrated early preschool programming.
- How youth can help guide school climate change in schools.
- The impact of school readiness in the kindergarten classroom. This study became the base for our current analysis of preschool programs.
- Best practices to address the issue of childhood obesity, from the early years through the teenage years.

### **A Bridge Between the Community, Family and the State**

The Commission speaks for children. We galvanize resources, constituents and unexpected stakeholders to make sure children thrive. We average 350 calls per week from local citizens and parents, 800 hits on our website per week and 30 requests per week from state and local policy leaders.

Statewide, we partner with mayors on children's issues, reach youth and parents, work with grandparents, help the librarians, and work with the police. We listen to the community and bring all input to you as state policy leaders for policy and program review.

Nationally we work with Congress and best practice think tanks to assure the top research on children arrives in Connecticut for consideration. I have been honored to serve as the National Conference of State Legislatures Staff Chair on Human Services. This has allowed me to know best practices in all fifty states regarding children and their families.

### **Staffing**

We made a commitment to build this agency so that you had the most exceptional staff for your child planning and child policy needs. Our small staff includes a former chief of staff member of the Washington, D.C. delegation, the former head of the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic, a former news reporter from a reputable daily newspaper, and a former planning director in the executive branch. We have two bi-lingual staff members to reach growing populations in our state. I myself was chief of staff for family policy for the state of California under Speaker Willie Brown, staff to the California Legislature's Human Services Committee and the Committee on the Changing Family. Previous to that, I staffed Congresswoman Bella Abzug and Congressman Al Lowenstein.

These combined staff skills lead to exceptional research, outstanding products, consumer design that truly reaches the public across educational level, high acumen in public policy, strategic sense and an understanding of each branch of government and the community.

### **Closing**

Unlike most agencies, our agency was cut 62% in the FY10 budget cycle. Then further holdbacks cut us more. What was \$1.1 million in FY09 is now \$686,553 in 2015. This is a cut of 37.6% compared to our budget in 2009. The Governor's recommended \$759,503 for 2016 would be a cut of 31% when compared to our budget in 2009. Our staff has worked dramatically reduced schedules. We once had 9 staff positions, now we have 7.

With these cuts, we continue to lead on child policy, national networks and funds for our state. We again are glad to participate in addressing the state's budget challenges, by absorbing a cut of \$133,637 in 2016 and \$178,200 in 2017. We will continue to bring resources in to the state, innovate best practice and ensure model policy. We can assure a return on investment in both quality and dollars.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.