



Testimony in support of SB 795

**AN ACT CONCERNING A TWO-GENERATIONAL SCHOOL  
READINESS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Human Services Committee

Darcy Lowell, MD

Founder & CEO Child First

February 10th, 2015

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Dr. Darcy Lowell, Founder & CEO of Child First, an evidence-based, two-generation, early childhood intervention serving the most vulnerable young children and their families. I am submitting my testimony today in support of SB 795, an Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness and Workforce Development Plan.

CT families and young children will significantly benefit from the advancement, expansion and strengthening of the two-generational models currently working throughout the state, *particularly those programs focused on early interventions aimed at impacting the social, emotional, and developmental outcomes of children from birth through 5 years.*

Research shows that children need to experience strong, nurturing relationships in order to have healthy brain development. In fact, it is the interactions between the young child and caregiver – the serve and return – that is responsible for the basic mental wiring of the brain. This is the foundation for all future learning. It is through this relationship that children develop the tools to excel in school, like trust, language development, impulse control, and problem solving.

But too many of our children and their families are plagued by chronic stress and trauma. When young children experience multiple environmental risks such as maternal depression, abuse, neglect, homelessness, or domestic violence their mental health and long-term learning and health can be permanently damaged. By simultaneously addressing the needs of both parent and child, we can prevent this damage. *Providing strong, two-generational evidence-based intervention early on is smart and extremely cost effective.*

As a child grows older, and the environmental adversity is not addressed or mitigated, the interventions become costlier with poorer outcomes for the families and for our state as a whole. In the U.S., 39% of child abuse cases occur in the first four years of life. The lifetime cost of one victim of maltreatment due to adverse mental health and economic consequences is \$210,012. In Connecticut, special education services make up over 21% of our total education spending with the annual cost per child for special education in Connecticut reaching approximately \$16,000. Investing in evidence based, two-generational early intervention models produces very different outcomes at tremendous cost savings.

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. We have conducted rigorous research of our effectiveness, a randomized controlled trial. We found that at 12 month follow-up, children within the Child First program were 68% less likely to have

language problems. Child First mothers had 64% lower levels of depression and/or mental health problems. Child First families were 33% less likely to be involved with child protective services. The annual cost for Child First interventions is approximately \$7,000 per family. We can dramatically improve the lives of children and families and save millions of dollars as well.

But, there is a problem. Child First and other highly successful two-generation models in Connecticut are operating at full capacity. We could serve so many more children with additional resources and expanded state and federal supports. Child First has the capacity to serve about 1,000 children a year, which is insufficient in the face of the enormous demand for services. This year alone, our network has had waitlists above 250 children throughout the state, even after children and their families have been triaged to other programs.

I encourage members of this committee to ensure that this legislation helps to strengthen and expand the high quality and successful two-generational models that currently serve Connecticut's young children and their parents.

I urge you to adopt SB 795 which will help advance high quality, cost effective intergenerational programs designed to support and foster life-long success for children and their families.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my testimony in support of this important legislation.