

February 4 2015

Dear Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program. Until my retirement, I was the Practice/Nursing Manager for the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, the largest provider of pediatric care between Boston and New York. This practice was the initial site for Connecticut's Reach Out and Read program and has distributed thousands of books to families, many of whom would not otherwise have been able to have books in the home for their children.

I believe that we can all agree that literacy is an enormous problem for many children and research demonstrates that reading early and consistently to children improves their language skills, success in school, and improved graduation rates from high school. There are many literacy programs all of which have the same goals of improving children's love of reading and their success on standardized tests. I believe that the Read Out and Read Program is unique as it takes place in the medical office of the child's pediatric provider. Parents look to the provider for his/her expertise in a variety of areas and trust that the provider always has their child's well-being as their primary concern. As others have testified, the Reach Out and Read program begins with the child's six month well child visit and continues through the five year old physical – a total of 10 opportunities for the provider to reinforce the importance of reading to children as well as providing a new, age appropriate, language appropriate book. This consistent, repeated message from the child's provider with whom parents have established a trusting relationship makes this program different from others that seek to improve language skills in children.

I join others in asking you to support Senate Bill 209 not only because Reach Out and Read is an established, proven program, but also because we all benefit when literacy is improved among our neediest children. Prevention is the key to many problems in our society and increasing language skills leading to success in school will benefit all of us.

Thank you for your time and your consideration on this important topic.

Sincerely yours,

Carol S. Benjamin