

The Smarter Choice for Care



January 24, 2015

Senator Dante Bartolomeo
Representative Diana Urban
Committee on Children
State Capitol Building, Room 011
Hartford, CT 06106

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Education Committee.

SB 209, An Act Concerning Funding for Reach Out and Read.

I am Cliff O'Callahan, MD, PhD, a general pediatrician who is the pediatric faculty member within the Middlesex Hospital Family Medicine Residency, the Director of the hospital nursery, the physician champion for Middletown's Opportunity Knocks community collaborative, and a member of Middletown's School Readiness Board. I write today in my role as a physician and educator and community advocate to lend my support to SB 209 An Act Concerning Funding for Reach Out and Read.

As a pediatrician who teaches Family Medicine residents who will also care for children throughout Connecticut, I view low literacy as a health problem. Like the approach to other health problems, the best strategy to deal with illiteracy is prevention. Reach Out and Read is a national program to promote literacy by changing the way pediatricians practice medicine. Reach Out and Read gives doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and learning. The program is highly economical, requiring little infrastructure, providing books purchased at a sharply discounted rate and relying on pediatricians as an army of highly trained volunteers and trusted authorities to bring this important preventive strategy to families. Just around \$30 brings Reach Out and Read to a child all the way from birth to age 5 years.

Our Middletown, Portland, and East Hampton offices care for many children and about 60% of them use Medicaid. Many do have knowledgeable parents who have books at home and read to them – but there are also many who have no or few books at home and never have considered sitting with their child on their lap to interact with a book. Rather, they place them in a car seat in front of the television. We change that perspective every day through the skills gained by being a Reach Out and Read site.

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That personalized deeply social interaction stimulates brain more than any other activity during a period of time when these children's brains are growing faster than any other time in their lives. Interacting with books, incorporating them into a bed-time routine, empowering a child to pat, eat, throw that book is the most powerful brain feeding we can provide. We reinforce that message by giving them a book at each well child visit.

The Reach Out and Read model is a scientifically validated model to promote literacy skills beginning at the early age of 6 months. Numerous peer-reviewed research studies demonstrate important positive outcomes when families receive books and guidance through the ROR program. These studies have been carried out in at least 10 different states, with bilingual families, non-English speaking families and families for whom there are no books in the home language, yet the results are the same: Reach Out and Read families are significantly more likely to read to their children and to have more children's books in their homes.

This is certainly a program directed towards children and their parents but it is also a program that reminds and empowers pediatric care providers about the importance of universal promotion of brain feeding, developmental assessment, and social emotional strengthening.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cliff

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Cliff', written over a horizontal line.

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