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Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children.

I am Cynthia Roque, MD, a general pediatrician at Pediatric Associates of CT, P. C., a pediatric office that serves a large, diverse population of children in the Greater Waterbury area. I am writing this letter of testimony in my role as a Medical Advisor of Reach Out and Read CT, Advisory Board and a mother, to lend my support to Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program.

As a pediatrician, I have dedicated my life to helping children by working with parents to care for their children during times of illness, implement healthy lifestyle choices which can optimize their child's nutrition and growth and promote healthy routines that would enable every child to have the same opportunities for a healthy brain development, learning and overall well being that would last a lifetime. Although sometimes I feel as though "Healing the World," is a daunting task, I find fulfillment in my work by knowing that I can "make a difference" one child at a time. This dream of mine has become a reality with the Reach Out and Read Program (ROR).

Before moving to Waterbury, I practiced as a general pediatrician at The Community Health Center, Inc in New London CT, where I helped to implement the program. I know by completing a Quality Improvement project for the office in which we surveyed parents before and after the introduction of Reach Out and Read, that parental behaviors can change. Parents increased the number of days per week that they read to their children after we implemented ROR. As a result, those parents who weren't reading regularly to their children, began to read a-loud to their children, and those who were already reading, began reading with a purpose. Just by knowing this information, I am 100% convinced that this program works. As a pediatrician, I know that the primary way to change a child's life is by influencing their primary caregivers' behavior.

Parents and caregivers seek medical advice from known and trusted health care providers, because they want to do what's best for their child. Reach Out and Read is beneficial for many reasons. One, it is a simple intervention that can help foster this parent – provider relationship and also create a more pleasant experience for the child while in the office. For example, since implementation of ROR into my new practice, I feel a new sense of connection between myself and the child as well as myself and the

parents. By handing the book to the child, there is now an easy way to engage the child during a well exam, while at the same time examining the child's abilities and exposure to books. Having the book also helps reduce the child's anxiety about what is to come during the rest of the visit and also offers a way to connect with the parent. With the book, I can demonstrate how the child is using the book correctly or I can use this encounter as a "teachable moment" for the parent.

Ultimately, the parents leave happy, proud of what their child can do with the book, excited about having a new way to engage their child at home, and the child is excited about taking the book home. I can use this encounter to teach the importance of reading- a- loud daily, and the significant positive impact this has on their child's brain development and I can praise the parents who are doing this routinely, and intervene early in the child's life if this is not being done routinely at home. It is a well known fact, supported by the new AAP policy and recommendations, that we can decrease the educational gap seen in our state by improving early literacy outcomes if we intervene early and efficiently. Based on research, the Reach Out and Read program has accomplished this. This is how I have accomplished my goal of making a difference in this child's life, future and hence the future of our community and society. I hope that we can continue to expand our efforts by increasing the number of doctors and offices who can do the same.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Cynthia Roque, MD, FAAP