

Department of Pediatrics

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 209 TO REINSTATE FUNDING FOR REACH OUT AND READ

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My name is **Dr. Paul Dworkin** and, as Executive Vice President for Community Child Health at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, I urge you to support **Senate Bill 209** to reinstate funding for **Reach Out and Read** in Connecticut. As Connecticut's only free-standing children's hospital, we at Connecticut Children's have embraced the vision of the children of Connecticut being the healthiest in the nation and have created a new Office for Community Child Health to strengthen our many community-oriented programs to promote children's optimal healthy development. In our work, we seek to implement and diffuse evidence-based programs that strengthen children's development and yield a return on investment. **Reach Out and Read** is precisely the type of evidence-based, wise investment that we must make to ensure our children's healthy development.

I trust that you are increasingly familiar with the evidence of Reach Out and Read's effectiveness in enhancing children's language development and academic performance. How remarkable that this simple and efficient intervention, including counseling of parents on the importance of reading to young children and the distribution of free books at well-child visits, has such a profound impact on children's wellbeing and future functioning. You may not be as aware of our long-standing history with Reach Out and Read over many years, as the Department of Pediatrics at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center was the first site in the nation in the 1990's to replicate the pioneering work performed at then Boston City Hospital in introducing books and reading to children and families in a pediatric clinic. The subsequent diffusion of this innovation throughout our State and the extent to which it has been embraced by families and our child health providers is remarkable.

Health care reform demands that we embrace evidence-informed interventions that are cost effective and have a return on investment. I have already emphasized the research demonstrating the efficacy of Reach Out and Read. We also know that such interventions yield a financial return on investments. In fact, economist James Heckman won the Nobel Prize for demonstrating the significant return on dollars invested in early childhood,

with every \$1 invested yielding some \$7 in return. Reach Out and Read, in promoting the language and reading skills of children, will yield long-term savings in costs associated with special education, behavioral health services, and even juvenile corrections. The sobering correlation between reading skills at school entry and 3rd grade and likelihood of involvement with the corrections system speaks to the benefits of bringing Reach Out and Read to scale throughout the State.

We, in Connecticut, are making considerable commitments to the young children's healthy development. Select examples include the creation of a new Office for Early Childhood, support for expansion of high quality childcare slots, promotion of developmental screening through the Help Me Grow campaign of the Children's Trust Fund, and consultation to childcare settings for children with behavioral concerns. Support for Reach Out and Read is an efficient and efficacious strategy to promote our children's healthy development and a critical component of our State's comprehensive system building in support of young children. Please ensure that this important initiative can be brought to scale, impact, and sustainability in the best interests of our children, families, and society.

Thank you for your support.