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Testimony of Dr. Sumith Madhavarapu of the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's  
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**IN SUPPORT OF SB 209,**

**AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE REACH OUT AND READ PROGRAM**

Before the Connecticut General Assembly's Committee on Children

February 5, 2015

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

Dear Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban:

My name is Dr. Sumith Madhavarapu and I am a resident currently in my last year of training in the field of pediatrics. I am writing today to testify in favor of Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program.

As a pediatrician, I see low literacy as I see any other health problem. This is a health issue that is best treated with PREVENTION. People who are considered low literate require intervention and therapy that can be seen as a financial burden and overstress educational resources. Reach Out and Read is a national program that helps offset this. By providing books at every well child check from 6 months of age to 5 years of age, one person can attain 10 books over that time. This may seem like a small number but this is all it takes to make a big difference. Studies have shown that reading to your child promotes brain development and helps strengthen the bond with parents and children. In one of my roles as a resident, I work directly with our hospital's Reach Out and Read Program and am in charge of inventory and stocking. I see first-hand just how highly economical this program is. The books are purchased in bulk at a discounted rate, orders are processed online, and they arrive in just a few weeks. Then, I have the pleasure of distributing them to my patients at the clinic.

There are numerous examples I can think of where families tell me how much they enjoy the books and spending time with the kids. There is one family in particular that I would like to share with you. I take care of a Spanish Speaking family of 6 who have twin girls that are almost 3 years old. I have seen them since their newborn visit when they were not even one week old yet. I have watched them grow over these three years. Whenever I walk in with books, their faces seem to light up the room. They would reach for the books before they could crawl, crawl to the books before they could walk, and now, they run to the books when they see them. The parents are very hard working individuals who are very good

parents. Father and mother are on opposite work schedules to make ends meet and sometimes they do feel overstretched and can find themselves living paycheck to paycheck but always manage to put food on the table. They spend money only on the necessities which leaves little for books. They are always appreciative of our generosity because without it they probably would not have much to choose from. They honor the time they are able to spend together and that is often either when eating or reading together. They appreciate that we give them Spanish and Bilingual books to help strengthen their children's vocabulary. I take great pleasure in watching these two girls grow and meeting their developmental milestones along the way.

Reach Out and Read has an integral part in our community. Our community is very high-risk in literacy and this is a tool to offset that. Please support Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Dr. Sumith Madhavarapu