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

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Yong-Son Basta, MD. I am a general pediatrician in Stamford, CT. My patient population is composed primarily of children from underserved communities, those of low-income and immigrant families. And they are full beneficiaries of the literary program of the Reach Out and Read Program. Hence, I am writing this letter today in full support of Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read (ROR) Program.

Reach Out and Read is a national program that promotes literacy in evidence-based practice. The program combats illiteracy by preventive measures, by promoting child development and learning during a child's critical developmental stage. ROR promotes literacy exposure beginning at age 6 months. Innumerable positive outcomes of ROR model have been scientifically validated by multiple research studies and peer reviews, results that have been replicated in 10 different states, including Connecticut. The children who are beneficiaries of the ROR Program are appreciably more likely to read to and be prepared to enter the school system. Studies have shown ROR participants test a higher vocabulary assessment at age 2 years. Needless to say, the program is especially critical for children living in low-income families. Anecdotally, I have noticed an increase in English proficiency in parents or caretakers of the children whose primary household idiom is a language other than English. The adults learn English as they read to their children, in many cases reading books that are printed bilingually, books which are provided by ROR.

Furthermore, the program is extremely cost-effective. It purchases books at a deeply discounted rate, and it requires minimal infrastructure. It trains and relies on community pediatrician volunteers like myself to initiate, encourage, and advise early literacy exposure. We are deeply committed advocates who not only promote literacy, but through the ROR program can actually distribute and deliver books for the families to take home.

I would like to end this letter by sharing a story, a story to illustrate how critical it is for CT to pass Senate Bill 209 to fund the Reach and Read Program. I have always been an ardent advocate of early literacy skills. To many caregivers' surprise, I encourage families to start reading soon after birth. I have received my share of skeptical mirth for this advice. But I also have received plenty of joyous moments, moments like when a mother of a 2 year old toddler

breathlessly gushes how her daughter recognizes alphabets, colors, and shapes, radiant unmasked pride in her voice. The mother thanks me, attributing her daughter's notable developmental skills to early literacy exposure. For a practitioner like myself who deals with children from an underserved community, I cannot tell you how vital the Reach Out and Read Program is to CT to continue to hear great stories like that.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Yong-Son Basta, MD