

Testimony Supporting SB 209 AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE REACH OUT AND READ PROGRAM

Reach Out and Read is a wonderful program and is a scientifically validated school readiness model that introduces a new book to children from the ages of 6 months to 5 years old in the structure of the pediatric office, at which parents regularly see their doctors for one-to-one visits focused on the healthy growth and development of children. Within these ages, children are generally seen 10 times for well child visits. Doctors give guidance to parents on how to read to their children in a way that is developmentally appropriate, and send them home with new, carefully chosen, developmentally and culturally appropriate books.

Across Connecticut, there are now thousands of young children who are getting books every time they visit the pediatrician for their check ups. Their parents are hearing about the importance of reading aloud because ROR has trained medical providers to talk to families about making books and reading a part of every young child's day—every day.

Having books in the exam room really changes the way the pediatrician delivers care. Using a book in the well-child exam provides the physician with a wide range of information: an assessment of each child's gross and fine motor development, speech and language, letter and color recognition. Parents get tips on how to incorporate reading into their family's daily routines and children get books to bring home. From the age of six months through five years, children receive a book at every well child visit. That is ten books in five years—a small home library!

As pediatricians, we know that children who learn to love books at an early age are more likely to start school ready to read and succeed, more likely to stay in school and more likely to break away from the cycle of poverty.

It is an inexpensive intervention that makes a BIG difference. You know how important books have been in your own life—in keeping you informed, in bringing you pleasure, and in opening up the world. Reading aloud with young children is one of the most effective ways to expose them to enriched language and to encourage specific early literacy skills needed to promote school readiness. Indeed, early, regular parent-child reading may be an epigenetic factor associated with later reading success.

We all know that children unable to read on grade level are at elevated risk for school failure, school drop out, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and criminal activity. Pediatricians feel that whatever we can do to help a child succeed, we will do. Reach Out and Read makes literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric care so that children grow up with books and a love of reading. Armed with strengthened language skills and the intense desire to learn to read, children are better prepared to meet the challenges of school entry.

The CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and its over 1000 pediatricians wholeheartedly support Reach Out and Read, and encourages the State of CT to support reading at all ages.