



Testimony in Support of SB 1008

Respectfully Submitted by

Ann Pratt, Director of Policy and Partnerships, Child First
Committee on Children

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Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Ann Pratt, Director of Policy & Partnerships at Child First, an evidence-based, two-generation, early childhood intervention serving Connecticut's most vulnerable young children and their families.

We are in full support of SB 1008, An Act Establishing an Infant and Toddler Services Board for the purpose of formulating a strategic plan to ensure the health and well-being of children ages birth to three.

Child First supports the thorough and comprehensive study of children's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable young children from birth through 5 years of age, who are experiencing multiple challenges in their environments, such as **maternal depression, child trauma, domestic violence, substance abuse or homelessness**. We know from the research on "toxic stress" and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that this type of chronic stress damages the developing brain leading to long term disability in child mental health, learning, and physical health. Finding these children and **intervening early** can prevent these very negative outcomes, saving our state millions of dollars.

It is our hope and strong recommendation that within the strategic plan the following recommendations and components will be integrated and emphasized:

- 1) The need for a clear strategy to be created for screening of risk conditions in the environment which lead to significant mental health, health, and cognitive problems, as articulated above
- 2) If unmet social-emotional/mental health needs for young children are discovered, a clear commitment is made to expand the capacity for evidence-based, trauma-informed early childhood mental health interventions
- 3) Informed by these studies, the state increases its commitment to implement mental health treatment for young children that is developmentally appropriate and focuses on the relationship between children and their primary caregivers
- 4) The state develops an early childhood mental health system, which includes a continuum of evidence-based interventions from low to high intensity, to efficiently meet the level of family need, delivered in a variety of family-friendly settings

- 5) In order to ensure adequate intervention and treatment for the mental, social, and emotional needs of our young children, early childhood, evidence-based mental health services in the home are covered by Medicaid and commercial insurance
- 6) The state ensures that interventions include addressing parental challenges – like depression, substance abuse, and domestic violence – because this adversity is proven toxic to the emotional, cognitive, and physical development of young children

We want to also strongly recommend that the development of this strategic plan for children from birth to three include early childhood, developmental, and mental health experts from both within and **outside** of the state system to evaluate and assess the efficacy and developmental appropriateness of interventions for young children.

We encourage members of this committee to ensure that this legislation helps to strengthen and **expand the capacity** of the high quality and successful early childhood mental health interventions that currently serve Connecticut’s youngest and most vulnerable children and their parents.

I want to thank you most sincerely for this opportunity to provide support for SB 1008.