



Children First Griswold Testimony on H.B. No. 6824

To the Attention of: Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee

On behalf of the Children First Griswold local early childhood council, I implore you to reinstate funding to the Office of Early Childhood for **Community Planning**. Although the amount of state funding given to the office of Early Childhood for Community Planning is relatively small (under \$20,000 to Griswold), this funding is matched dollar for dollar by the Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund and its withdrawal would completely dismantle the early childhood infrastructure that our collaborative of parents, caregivers, teachers, community leaders, service providers and others have worked tirelessly to develop.

The collaborative work that is funded through **Community Planning** has not only brought in a dollar for dollar match from private funders like the Graustein Memorial Fund, but it has allowed us to leverage in an exponentially greater amount of money, from federal and local sources, including:

- \$547,000 Federal Preschool Development Grant to significantly enhance opportunities for quality preschool education.
- \$20,000 School district in-kind match for an Early Childhood Coordinator position.
- \$7,700 Town of Griswold to support and develop our Early Childhood infrastructure.
- \$5,000 OPM grant to reduce chronic absenteeism amongst Kindergarteners.
- \$1,000 Corinne Levin Fund grant to increase community engagement and cohesion.

Through the creation of our **Early Childhood Community Plan**, which is based on the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework, we have identified the specific needs of our children and families and have developed data-driven strategies that are having a tremendous, measurable impact on the real barriers to our children's success, some of which include:

- **Increase access to quality preschool education**
With the aforementioned preschool development grant and increased advocacy for school readiness funding, we have been able to provide quality preschool education to our most vulnerable children.

- **Chronic Absenteeism Prevention**

Developed and implemented Chronic Absenteeism initiative proven to improve school attendance. The program includes a Home Visitor who visits families struggling with attendance and offers support and guidance to help them get their children to school.

- **Increased Access to Healthy Food**

With no local grocery store, high levels of poverty and low access to transportation, we are what the USDA calls a “**Food Desert**”. Through our planning process and collaborative work, we secured our town as a feeding site for the United Way mobile food pantry which provides fresh fruit, vegetables and more to nearly 200 families every month. We are also in the process of developing a community garden to help increase access to healthy food for our families.

The rural poor are all too often forgotten at the expense of cities with a higher density of population. Because supports are provided on a regional basis, nearby cities of Norwich, for example, draw the limited resources that service providers have. It is through our early childhood council that the citizens of Griswold are able to be heard and advocate for the needs of our children and families.

If Griswold’s early childhood council ceased to exist, the aforementioned initiatives would cease to exist, as would the army of volunteers that this funding allows us to mobilize. We would also lose the ability to support our families through capacity-building conferences and programs, parenting classes, literacy events and community cohesion events.

The research on the importance of developing strong cognitive and social skills in the first five years of life is definitive. It is also known that stressors such as **poverty**, abuse and neglect damage the developing architecture of the brain leading to lifelong problems with learning, behavior, and physical and mental health and the indicators of poverty in our town have drastically increased over the past six years. Since 2006, the unemployment rate in Griswold has climbed from 4.6% to 9.4% and the number of food stamp cases (per 1,000) has skyrocketed from 65 to 110.4. (ctdata.org) These statistics do not merely reflect the crises faced by the adults, but also the children for whom they strive to provide. Griswold is home to approximately 1,500 children who are birth through age eight. Allowing our children to move through their early years without the support they deserve will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the life chances of those children and ultimately the health and vitality of our community.

Please reinstate funding to the Office of Early Childhood for Community Planning so that we may continue the implementation of our Community Plan to achieve a result that “All of Griswold’s children, from birth to eight, are healthy, prepared and successful lifetime learners!”