

Testimony of Jessica Stewart

Middletown School Readiness/Discovery Council

Before the Appropriations Committee

Date of Hearing March 3, 2015

Senator Beth Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee,

Funding cuts to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) were made by Governor Malloy which directly impacts the Discovery Communities across Connecticut. The Middletown Local Early Childhood Council is looking for your support in reinstating these funds back into the OEC budget. These funds help support Local Early Childhood Councils across Connecticut, who help children prenatally through age 8; connecting them and their families to the services to help them all be successful in school, and beyond. These funds are also used for Parent Leadership, Early Literacy initiatives and health initiatives.

To be more specific, the Memorial Fund is offering to match State investments in the following ways:

- State funding of \$900,000 would be **matched by \$800,000** from the Memorial Fund **and \$200,000** from the Children's Fund of Connecticut.
- State funding of \$150,000 would be **matched by \$175,000** from the Memorial Fund.
- State funding of \$500,000 for the Parent Trust Fund would be **matched by \$250,000** from the Memorial Fund.

In Middletown we are working to get a Social Worker into funded child care programs to provide services to families in need which will help to connect families to community programs, help them get their basic needs met, reduce chronic absenteeism, reduce child care expulsion rates, and ultimately reduce State services costs before children before they enter Kindergarten. We are also working to ensure children leave community programs connected to schools and ready to learn. With early literacy funds programs also receive on-site coaching to improve literacy experiences for children in their child care learning environments as well as at home.

Using Children's Fund monies, Middletown has been able to decrease the percentage of children with Active Tooth Decay by 6 percent (23% in 2006 down to 17% in 2011). Through Health Education with early care programs and families, the obesity rate among preschool-aged children (children with BMI at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile) reduced from 24% in 2006 to 13% in 2014. Middletown's capacity for home visiting with families has increased by over 400% since 1992 when 57 families were participating and in 2012 more than 237 families were participating in 2012.