

# Middlesex Coalition for Children

## **Testimony on proposed cuts to the Governor's budget**

**Izzi Greenberg, Executive Director**

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My name is Izzi Greenberg and I'm the director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children, a group that works to improve outcomes for low-income children in Middlesex County. I am testifying against budget cuts that affect early childhood and family support programs.

While we very much applaud the maintenance of funding to School Readiness Councils, Care for Kids and Family Resource Centers, these programs cannot support struggling families across the state alone. Parents need supports to raise healthy children, and families who are living in poverty need them even more.

The reduction of the funding for Quality Improvement across the state's early education networks is especially troublesome. Quality is a huge factor in the achievement gap—we can't pat ourselves on the back for increasing the number of pre-school slots in the state if that's all we do—we need to work toward ensuring that those children are receiving a high quality educational experience.

Roughly 50% of the children in Middletown are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Many parents lack sufficient education for working wage jobs and many of our residents are hovering at the poverty line. Programs that support families are not luxuries.

In Middletown alone, we have successful Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) Programs, Help Me Grow, Family School Connection and other family-centered programs. These programs are supporting the parents who are supporting our community's children with a two-generational, holistic approach. If we lose these programs, we lose a very valuable aspect of parent/child support that is doing much good for the people in our county and across the state.

We are requesting that you restore the cuts to Community Plans for Early Childhood line item. Middletown is given roughly \$50,000 from the State of Connecticut, with nearly all of it matched by the Graustein Memorial Fund and the Children's Fund of Connecticut. This money supports Early Childhood programs, Literacy Programs, health programs and the strong network of early care agencies and providers in Middletown.

Additionally, there are 4.8 million in cuts which eliminate the Healthy Food Certification program, a valuable nutrition program which provides funds to school districts based on the number of reimbursable lunches (free, reduced and paid) served during the prior school year. For years, Connecticut and our school nutrition programs have been leaders on the national front, providing meals and snacks that exceed federal nutrition standards. When Healthy Food Certification was adopted in 2006, CT led the nation in landmark legislation for high nutrition standards for food sold in schools and school fundraisers. Eliminating the support this program provides undermines Connecticut as a leader in school nutrition and wellness and takes a step backward in childhood nutrition.

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