



**Appropriations Committee  
Education Public Hearing – March 3, 2015**

**Testimony in Support of Restoring Funding for Help Me Grow**

**Submitted by Richard Porth, United Way of Connecticut**

My name is Richard Porth and I serve as CEO of United Way of Connecticut. We respectfully request the restoration of funding for Connecticut's Help Me Grow program.

Help Me Grow promotes the early detection and connection to services for children from birth to 8 years old with developmental or behavioral challenges. Created here in Connecticut in 2002, Help Me Grow has become a national model for early childhood systems promoting children's healthy development and is now being replicated in 24 other states.

Help Me Grow represents a modest investment which enables the large and complex service delivery system for children with developmental needs to function more efficiently. It is designed to empower families to identify their children's needs as they arise and to access appropriate help as soon as possible. Help Me Grow saves time and frustration for parents and providers alike by connecting children to the most appropriate services quickly.

Help Me Grow operates under the United Way of Connecticut 2-1-1 umbrella through our specialized Child Development Infoline service. Child Development Infoline is the centralized entry point for Help Me Grow as well as the state's Birth to Three system, the Pre-School Special Education Program (SDE), and the Children with Special Health Care Needs (DPH) program. Help Me Grow is a safety net for children not eligible for other services such as Birth to Three. This coordinated approach to service delivery and the blended funding strategy it employs has allowed the state to substantially leverage its modest investment in Help Me Grow and has produced real synergy in which the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts.

Help Me Grow, through Child Development Infoline, has been the vehicle for multiple service delivery strategies.

- Connecticut’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) federal grant strategy is built on the Help Me Grow framework.
- Connecticut’s MIECHV home visiting grant includes Child Development Infoline as an access point based on the Help Me Grow model.
- The Norwalk Community Initiative which seeks to aggregate the results of developmental and behavioral screenings to enable more informed decision-making about community-wide needs uses Help Me Grow as the springboard.
- Help Me Grow connects families to autism evaluations, family to family supports and other autism resources through the “Learn the Signs, Act Early” initiative.
- Help Me Grow provides the Ages and Stages Questionnaire tool online so that parents and providers can monitor children’s development and take action (with the support of Help Me Grow) when the need is identified. Currently, 4,300 families use the ASQ through Help Me Grow.
- The Office of Early Childhood’s recently released home visiting plan includes Help Me Grow/Child Development Infoline as part of the infrastructure to coordinate referrals among the various home visiting programs.

For all of these reasons and in order to continue to build into the future on Help Me Grow, which functions as the glue in the early childhood development system, please reinstate the funding in the Office of Early Childhood to maintain and strengthen Connecticut’s innovative Help Me Grow service. If you do, many more children and families will certainly benefit and Connecticut will continue as a national leader.

Thank you.

# Help Me Grow



## RESTORE STATE FUNDING FOR HELP ME GROW WHICH HELPS PARENTS AND PROVIDES ACCESS TO DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

- The Help Me Grow program provides access for Connecticut families to a **coordinated, statewide system** of early detection for children at-risk for adverse developmental and behavioral outcomes, as well as care coordination for these children and families.
- Help Me Grow, with its focus on early detection and intervention, is **cost effective** from the standpoint of both its modest cost (<\$400,000) and ultimate cost savings by minimizing the need for later, far more expensive interventions. Help Me Grow saves time and frustration for parents and frontline providers.
- Help Me Grow has been supported by the state of Connecticut since 2002 (most recently through the Office of Early Childhood) and has become a **national leader in early childhood systems building** and promoting children's healthy development. Currently, 24 states are affiliates of the Help Me Grow National Center and are replicating this initiative which began here in Connecticut.
- Through Child Development Infoline, Help Me Grow serves as a **safety net for children not eligible for other services**, such as Birth to Three and Early Childhood Special Education. Through Help Me Grow, over 2,400 children were referred to services and over 4,300 families were monitoring their child's development by participating in the Ages and States Child Monitoring Program last year.

I don't know what I would have done without Help Me Grow and that is the understatement of my life.

—Mother of a two-year-old

Resources for families are there, but too often people aren't aware of them.

—Parent

My husband and I are much more confident. We are not calling the doctor a hundred times a day because we think something is wrong.

—Parent

You know where your child should be and where they are in relation to other kids.

—Parent

- In early 2014, the Office of Early Childhood conducted a **Help Me Grow Campaign** to raise awareness about the critical need for developmental screening for children from birth to age five and early connections to services if needed. As a result of the Campaign, hundreds of parents and providers were trained in the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screening tool and over 1,000 families signed up to receive the ASQ from Help Me Grow. As a result of the Campaign, Help Me Grow is on a steep upward trajectory with increasing numbers of families enrolling their children in ASQ (4,300 at last count) and using the Help Me Grow care coordination services.
- Evaluations by the **University of Hartford Center for Social Research** have documented that 80 percent of families referred through Help Me Grow were successfully connected to needed services. Findings from their 2012 study indicates that Help Me Grow, by linking families to community-based programs and services, enhances protective factors (knowledge of parenting, child development and social and emotional guidelines and improved coping skills).
- Parents using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire through Help Me Grow highlight benefits including **parental reassurance** and alleviation of developmental concerns, **heightened awareness** of developmental tracking, and **stronger parenting** due to increased communication and parent education.

Help Me Grow, through 2-1-1's Child Development Infoline (CDI), has been the **vehicle for multiple service delivery strategies.**

- Connecticut's **Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS)** federal grant strategy is built on the Help Me Grow framework.
- Connecticut's **MIECHV home visiting grant** includes CDI as an access point based on the Help Me Grow model.
- The **Norwalk Community Initiative** which seeks to aggregate the results of developmental and behavioral screenings to enable more informed decision-making about community-wide needs uses Help Me Grow as its springboard.
- Help Me Grow connects families to autism evaluations, family to family supports and other autism resources through the **"Learn the Signs, Act Early"** initiative.

Children's issues are why I ran for the office. Help Me Grow looks to us to be a well thought-out, intelligent way of augmenting the services we have been trying to improve for kids already.

—Lt. Governor Matt Denn  
Delaware

Help Me Grow is a system that allows me to do my job as a pediatrician caring for families better, more simply, and fairly quickly.

—Cliff O'Callahan, MD  
Pediatric Faculty and  
Director of Nurseries  
Middlesex Hospital, CT

I think that Help Me Grow is one of the best systems I have seen in the past 20 years and know that it will continue to impact our ability to reach families who need so much help.

—Liz Peterson, Director  
Kids Who Count, Utah