

TESTIMONY ON S.B. No. 795: AN ACT CONCERNING A TWO-GENERATIONAL  
SCHOOL READINESS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Connecticut General Assembly's Human Services Committee:

My name is Dr. Janice Gruendel and I write as a human services professional in the State of Connecticut as well as a Fellow at the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University and as the former Deputy Commissioner for Operations at the Connecticut Department of Children and Families.

Over the past 18 months, I have been working with a number of states and organizations to create a better professional and public understanding of the power and possibilities inherent in the adoption of a systematic, research-informed two-generational approach to human service policy, practice and programs. My partners in this work include the National Governors Association, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Public Consulting Group, Institute for Child Success in South Carolina, and the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust in Forsyth County, North Carolina.

I cite these partnerships for two reasons. First, they reflect the kind of public-private partnerships that are fundamental to a research-informed design for two-generational work. Second, these organizations – representing philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, states and other governmental jurisdictions -- see great promise in a two-generational approach in achieving two important goals:

- Improving the delivery of existing *human services* (thus, a benefit to government and taxpayers) and
- Improving the *well-being and capacity of vulnerable families with children* (and adolescents) to achieve a better future.

In fact, the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust will shortly announce a ten-year, \$30 million dollar investment in families with young children in Forsyth County, North Carolina in which a two-generational framework is core to this mission.

I am very proud to be doing this work from a base in Connecticut public policy. Connecticut is now a national leader and can continue to expand its leadership role in redesigning our governmental and community systems to serve both children and their adult caregivers (that is, to take a 'whole family' approach). Just as the newly published Commission on Children's report on two-generational approaches has clearly outlined the opportunities, Senate Bill 795 will take us to the next phase of this work by enabling several demonstration sites to be funded

at the community level and by requiring ongoing attention to and accountability for cross-agency state level improvements in the way we now do business.

Within Connecticut state government, I have been especially privileged to work with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, both of whom are now engaged – together -- in the important business of supporting and investing in two-generation service designs at the community level. Commissioner Bremby testified recently on another two-generation bill, and his testimony reflects the best national thinking on how this kind of approach can both improve service design and delivery, and improve the lives of this state’s vulnerable families facing intergenerational economic and life challenges.

In addition to the obvious connection with the Connecticut Department of Social Services, there are also solid implications for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, especially in the area of improved services to families referred for “neglect” and in the delivery of Differential Response Services. In fact, the Harvard Center on the Developing Child recently published a very important paper entitled “The Science of Neglect” that could and should inform our two-generation work as it pertains to vulnerable families with very young children.

Let me speak a moment about Connecticut’s good timing as it moves intentionally and systematically into the “two (or more) generation space” involving public policy, case and agency practice, and program delivery.

**We already know a lot.** The science of brain development – and its translation for those of us in the policy and program arena – has greatly expanded and matured over the past decade. Here are four kind of examples of the enormous base of knowledge now available to us:

- ☑ A decade of working on the neuroscience of early development published and available online by the Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2004-2014)
- ☑ An expanding base of web resources available to us all from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, Foundation for Child Development, and the Institute for Child Success (and others)
- ☑ The Spring 2014 issue of *The Future of Children* entitled “Helping Children, Helping Families: Two-Generation Mechanisms” that reviews research on the efficacy and outcomes of two-generational work to date, and
- ☑ Several nationally recognized two-generation designs that have emerged from within Connecticut, including Child FIRST, All of Kin and the MOMS Partnership.

The bottom line here is that we must pay close attention to the key roles of adult caregivers, chronic stress and early adversity – in a two-generational context – if we are to substantially improve the school readiness and workforce outcomes for many of our children and families right here in Connecticut. *The absence of knowledge is no longer the impediment.*

**A two-generation approach requires more effective cross-sector and cross-agency work.** In 2012, right here in Connecticut we charted the location of programs that touch all families with young children (and are especially important to young, vulnerable families). We found that these programs “lived” in nine different state agencies. Were we to examine the location of programs for adolescents and disconnected youth, or adults returning from the justice system for “a second chance,” we would find a similar pattern, I am sure. While creation of the Office of Early Childhood addresses some of this challenge, for highly vulnerable families we have not constructed a service system that does not itself add to their burdens through its complexity, unclarity and competing or duplicate forms, practices and processes.

The report of the Two-Generation working committee clearly outlines the areas in which cross-agency/ cross-sector work can bring coherence to state policy, improve case practice that touches families, and help us to ensure that we are putting our money into programs that actually work. *Commitment to a two-generation framework can help us resolve this costly and critical issue of continued improvement in our human services delivery system.*

**The timing is right for Connecticut to move forward.** Both Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the National Governors Association will be supporting “two-generation learning networks” over the coming year. Connecticut is on the radar of both of these important organizations. Other states are also beginning to take this kind of approach seriously -- including Colorado, Washington State, Minnesota and Utah – and we should be leading the nation with them.

Similarly, Ready Nation – a national organization of business champions for smart investments in children, youth and families – is also focusing its current energies on those states that have taken a leadership position in the “two-generation space.” Connecticut is on their radar screen as well.

I urge the Connecticut General Assembly to take the next step and pass authorizing legislation such as SB 795 along with funding sufficient for several community two-generation pilots. Some may argue that we have another budget crisis and we just can’t afford to make this investment. *The facts, the neuroscience and our commitment to Connecticut’s families would argue that we simply can’t afford not to.*

### **Recent Work on Two-Gen**

Gruendel, J. *Two (or More) Generation Frameworks: A Look Within and Across.* March 2014) Published by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Ascend at the Aspen Institute

Gruendel, J. *Designing for Innovation in the Two-Generation Space* (December 2014). Policy and Practice, the journal of the Association of Public Human Services Administrators (APHSA)

Gruendel, J. *When Brain Science Meets Public Policy: Strategies for Building Executive Function and Self-Regulation Skills in the Early Years* (January 2015). Published by the Institute for Child Success

Gruendel, J. *When Brain Science Meets Public Policy: Rethinking the Governance of Early Childhood Systems* (February 2015). Published by the Institute for Child Success

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