



## **Hearing of the Committee on Children**

**Tuesday, February 16th, 2016**

### **Testimony**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of S.B. 10 – An Act Increasing Access to Child Care for Children Who Are Homeless.

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of this very important legislation.

S.B. 10 would change two early childhood policies to ensure children experiencing homelessness have easier access to child care services. Nearly half of the children experiencing homelessness in our state are under the age of five. Streamlining access to early childhood education for homeless children would open up a whole new world for them. It would allow parents to search for jobs and go on job interviews and, most importantly, allow families to exit homelessness faster.

We at Inspirica thank the Governor for putting this legislation forward, realizing the need for homeless children to have wider access to early childhood education. S.B. 10 will allow us to assist our parents in moving beyond homelessness while at the same time introducing their children to early childhood education.

This bill would create a “protective services” category within the Care4Kids child care subsidy program. It would also create a 90-day grace period for providing documentation of health and immunization records when enrolling in a child care center or family child care home. These two provisions knock down significant barriers and open up early childhood education to homeless children.

Under the current system, families are eligible for Care4Kids if they receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), participate in an approved education or training program, or are employed. Many times, our homeless families do not meet this criteria when they first come to Inspirica, so they are unable to place their child in any early childhood education setting. The parent then has no childcare to search for jobs or go on interviews and the child is left without any structured educational experience. Already behind because of homelessness, the family, particularly the child, is at risk of falling further behind.

S.B. 10 would also create a 90-day grace period for providing documentation of health and immunization records when enrolling in a child care center. Under the current system, licensing statutes require families



to provide this documentation before a child can be enrolled. Often, families experiencing homelessness do not have immediate access to these records. Even when families are able to enroll their children in an early learning setting, they are faced with a further wait while they locate the proper documents. During this time, children are denied vital early education.

Birth to age 5 is a critical time – perhaps the most critical time – in a child’s development. Early childhood experiences are essential to providing the foundation for cognitive development, brain development, motor skill development, literacy and social skills, all of which impact future learning and success. We know that homeless children begin losing ground educationally from infancy. Due to desperate financial circumstances, and frequent moving, homeless children often miss much, if not all, of their early education. Some of our homeless children have never even been read a book.

Homeless children need a safe and stable learning environment. In most cases the circumstances leading up to their homelessness were traumatic. When a child suffers trauma, the absolute best environment for them is one of structure, safety and stability. The current system denies them this environment.

Recognizing this severe deficit, we at Inspirica launched our Early Childhood and Parenting Program (ECPP). ECPP provides pre-literacy and developmental programming to children from birth to age five, and concurrent training for their parents. Our key program goal in the Early Childhood and Parenting Program is to ensure that the youngest, most vulnerable children receive the foundational skills they need to develop in line with their peers who are not homeless.

The early childhood component combines solid instruction with state of the art sensory experiences for children. It builds crucial language, pre-literacy and social/emotional skills. Everything in the program space, including the paint on the walls, has been researched and chosen because of its superior educational quality. It is inviting and stimulating for children to explore, learn and develop crucial skills.

I noticed a child in our lobby three weeks ago. He was with mom all day because she did not yet have the job that would qualify her for Care4Kids. I asked her to bring him to our program and he loved it! I heard from his case worker the next day that he began asking to go to the program starting at three hours before the program start time!!

This bill will also go far in helping children get ready for Kindergarten. Under the current system, many of our children cannot receive early childhood education of any kind. Every day they cannot attend these programs is a day they are not building the necessary skills for Kindergarten. This bill will eventually save us money because there will be much less need for services for children who come to Kindergarten unprepared for the structure and curriculum.

By providing immediate access to quality childcare and freeing homeless parents to search and interview for jobs, S.B. 10 goes a long way in breaking the cycle of homelessness

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important proposed legislation.

Barbara McLaughlin  
Director of Early Childhood and Parenting Programs  
Inspirica