



Sharing Together Enriches Potential Success for Children

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The Honorable Senator, Beth Bye & The Honorable Representative, Toni E. Walker
Co-Chairmen, Appropriations Committee

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am the Coordinator of Coventry STEPS, which is Coventry's Early Childhood Collaborative. Coventry STEPS is a 50+ member organization comprised of local and state leaders, early care and education professionals and parents and community members that seeks to ensure that all Coventry children are Nurtured, Healthy and Engaged & Successful Learners. Coventry STEPS has been in existence since 2008. Coventry has been receiving support from the Graustein Memorial Fund, in partnership with the Office of Early Childhood. As you may know, the Graustein Memorial Fund is now working in a different field, racial and economic equality, which leaves the funding for our early childhood collaborative, and many others around the state very uncertain. It is imperative that the funding for **Community Plans for Early Childhood** from the Office of Early Childhood be continued!

Coventry STEPS has been very successful in engagement of the community around all early childhood initiatives. Coventry STEPS has created a forum for all stake holders, which did not exist in years past, to work together to improve outcomes for young children. Coventry STEPS has been able to engage parents and provide them with information and resources. Coventry STEPS has created a birth packet, which is sent to all families who have a new baby, a website, a facebook page and an 8 page early childhood resource guide. Parents now have access to meaningful, local information. None of these materials and resources were available before!

Without funding from the Office of Early Childhood for the Community Plans for Early Childhood, we will have very limited, or perhaps no resources for local data collection, community publications, events for children and their families, parent engagement opportunities, and most importantly the staff that provides leadership to ensure that all

In the draft of the OEC Strategic Plan, dated January 2016, there are several objectives that are, in my opinion, going to be near impossible for OEC to accomplish without the support of the local collaboratives. First, Objective 1.1 strategy 2 lists: Communicate effectively with families and caregivers. My almost 15 years of experience working with children and their families has proven that relationships are the best way to really make a positive impact in a child's life. Communicating and supporting families is best done at a local level by experts in that community who have relationships with the families and with all the providers and services in the area. A family friendly OEC website would be helpful, but to really make a difference, the State needs to have that support at the local level. Second, Objective 4.1 strategy 2 lists: Support and connect with local planning and collaboration partners (existing early childhood local planning bodies). Without funding support for OEC, communities such as Coventry and others around the state may no longer have Early Childhood Collaboratives, thus making this strategy impossible for OEC to achieve.

We know that birth-age 5 is the most critical time for brain development. For that reason, I oppose the \$12 million overall cut to the Office of Early Childhood (\$4 million in direct cuts, \$8 million in underfunding of Birth- Three). We MUST invest all resources necessary to ensure that children grow and develop and become productive citizens in the future.

I also oppose the block grant approach to the budget which has been proposed by the Governor. Lumping all programs into one Office of Early Childhood budget erases transparency. Without guidelines for the agencies to set and publicize their budget decisions, programs would be left in the dark as to how to proceed to serve children.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Hassler
Coordinator, Coventry STEPS