



A Family Learning Program

Torrington Even Start

Written Testimony of Melissa Stewart
Parent, Torrington Even Start Program
Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Melissa Stewart. I am a Torrington Even Start parent. Even Start is a family learning program that provides comprehensive family-centered education programs to improve children's academic success and to increase parents' economic opportunities.

I am writing to urge you to reinstate funding for the Even Start Program line item in the Office of Early Childhood budget to support local two generation learning. In my community, the Torrington Early Childhood Collaborative in Partnership with the Torrington Public Schools, received \$146,952.67 from this line item which was leveraged and matched resulting in more than \$150,000 to support creating healthy outcomes for families with young children and paving a way to higher education and careers.

As a parent in the Even Start Program, I believe that cutting the budget for even start would take away from the young teenage mothers and fathers who need guidance on having a baby. The program teaches valuable information about children, giving the parents a general idea of what to expect. I am a 17 year old high school student who uses this program and I have found it extremely useful. Each class I learn new things that I would've never thought of before. Being a teen mom and being a minor myself, there are a lot of things I didn't know about babies, and this program covers a variety of subjects about children. Safety, for example, is a huge deal in today's world and everything has changed so much, there are so many new laws on car seats, cribs, what food the baby should have, etc. Without this program I wouldn't know some of the things I know now. I'm lucky and am very close with my mother, she has helped me with my son ever since I brought him home from the hospital. She gives me advice on what is good for the Baby but some kids may not have that type of support. If they have little knowledge and no one to help them, they will find raising the child a lot harder than if they had someone supporting them in the first place. Another reason even start has helped a lot is that there is free daycare. Again, being a teenage mom and having to go to school and take care of a baby, I need someone to watch him while I'm in school. Both of my parents work, which would mean the baby would have no one to watch him. But because of the ymca's free daycare, i can go to school and not worry about who is going to take care of him while I am away. Daycare is extremely expensive, and I would not otherwise be able to afford it if it wasn't for this program. I think all in all the Even Start program gives knowledge on how to safely raise a baby and it also helps with daycare. I'm glad I got into this program and it would be very upsetting if the budget gets cut.

Sincerely,

Melissa Stewart