

Middlesex Coalition for Children

Testimony of Middlesex Coalition for Children Before the Appropriations Committee, February 16, 2016

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

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you tonight. My name is Izzi Greenberg and I am the Executive Director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children. My group works to improve outcomes for low-income children through advocacy, education, and coordination. I am testifying on the Governor's proposed budget, against cuts to the Office of Early Childhood, and specifically against budget cuts around family support programs.

First, I would like to stress that the Governor's proposal to move to a line item budget is not the right direction for our state. This process we are immersed in is not fun, but it is important. It allows both the public and its chosen representatives (you) time to provide input and education on the programs most important to us.

A block grant approach allows too much power to unelected officials and serves to create a barrier between the citizens of Connecticut and the important programs funded by the state. Transparency is important.

Second, in terms of specific cuts, I am opposed to the proposed \$4 million direct cut to the Office of Early Childhood, in addition to the \$8 million underfunding of the important Birth to Three program.

Parents need supports to raise healthy children, and families who are living in poverty need them even more.

There are important programs serving children in our communities that are at risk. Those include Care4Kids, Child Development Centers, the Children's Trust Fund, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Early Literacy, Even Start, Head Start, and School Readiness.

Roughly 50% of the children in Middletown are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Many parents lack sufficient education for working wage jobs and many of our residents are hovering at the poverty line. Programs that support families are not luxuries.

In our town alone, we have successful Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) Programs, Family School Connection, Family resource Centers, and other family-centered programs. These programs are supporting the parents who are supporting our community's children with a two-generational, holistic approach. If we lose or degrade these programs, we lose a very valuable aspect of parent/child support that is doing much good for the people in our county and across the state.

Our Middletown and Middlesex County communities have done a great job of keeping kids from falling through the cracks. It takes vigilance, education, coordination, and money to make sure the system works. If this budget removes the financial backbone of these important programs, our coordinated efforts will fall behind and our children will be the ones to suffer for it in the short term, but in the long-term, our entire state will suffer.

These programs are costly, but we are past the point where we can afford to leave people behind.

Submitted by: Izzi Greenberg, Director, Middlesex Coalition for Children, February 16, 2016