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Testimony of Robin Lamott Sparks
Executive Director
Coalition for New Britain's Youth
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Robin Lamott Sparks, and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for New Britain's Youth. The Coalition serves as the go-to, backbone organization to support the success of New Britain's children and youth by supporting a common agenda and a shared measurement system using a Results Based Accountability process. The Coalition's work addresses the problems of inadequate and uncoordinated services for families with young children, birth through 24. There are over 50 different community organizations actively participating in the Coalition's work. New Britain's School Readiness Council also operates within the Coalition.

First, I want to strongly oppose the collapsing of line-items into agency operations budgets. This proposal is a shift of the balance of powers that have been a fundamental principle of our democracy: the power of the purse lies with the people. If implemented, this proposal will decrease transparency, and result in great uncertainty among programs that serve our young children.

While I am concerned about many programs that affect young children, I am particularly concerned about the funding for the Community Plans for Early Childhood line item in the Office of Early Childhood budget. These funds support organizations like mine that supply the local infrastructure for early childhood program coordination, training, parent outreach, and data collection. In 2015, the \$660,000 in this line item supported more than 40 local early childhood councils. Councils were then able to match these funds with millions in philanthropic and local funds to run essential programs that have improved early childhood in our communities.

The Coalition for New Britain's Youth used the Community Plans for Early Childhood funds we received to support the infrastructure of our organization which coordinates all of the programs we run, including our leading edge work combatting chronic absenteeism which was highlighted in the New York Times this past fall, and our Summer Enrichment Experience, a nationally recognized program for our youngest struggling readers that is showing great success combating summer learning loss.

As a direct result of state and private funding to support local planning efforts, the Coalition and our school and community partners have made a measurable difference in the lives of New Britain's youth:

- The number of New Britain five year olds entering kindergarten with an early childhood experience has increased from 38% in 2003 to 81% in 2014.
- The number of kindergartners who were chronically absent was reduced by 44% since 2011.

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New Britain's youth have the skills needed to be successful in school, career, and life



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- Of the participants in our Summer Enrichment Experience program, 57% of the children showed no summer slide in 2015. And for those students who attended the program in both 2013 and 2014, their chronic absenteeism rate decreased by 11%.

The loss of the State's support will result in the loss of matching and program funds that are contributed through private donations and foundations. The total loss of all of these dollars will devastate our capacity to implement the changes and strategies detailed in our Coalition's plan, will jeopardize our capacity to support a local system of early childhood services and supports, and will devastate not only our work across the community, but our capacity to work in unison with the State's Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education. It is therefore critical that the line-item for Community Plans for Early Childhood be maintained and continued in order to support the work of local collaboratives like ours.

Thank you for your attention. I am happy to answer any questions about the work of The Coalition for New Britain's Youth or provide further details.