

Testimony of Middlesex YMCA Phelps Ingersoll Center for children

Carly Dinnie, Assistant Director

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee

My name is Carly Dinnie and I am the School Readiness Assistant Director of the Middlesex YMCA Phelps Ingersoll Center for Children. We currently serve 85 children, all of whom are in school readiness slots located within three (3) sites throughout Middletown. At this time 84% of the families we serve at below 50% of the state median income (of this number, 62% of families fall below 25% of the state median income), and many of the remaining who are over are the "ALICE" families of Connecticut. At this time in order to pay Teachers an adequate salary which for a BA degree we feel is \$25 per hour, we would need to collect approximately \$16,000 per year per child; but in reality we are only collecting an average of \$10,000 per year and that fluctuates each year depending upon the parent fee contribution, and Care4Kids.

I am writing this letter to oppose the 12 million dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood. Furthermore, the block grant approach being proposed by the Governor creates much difficulty for our center as how to proceed in serving our children and families since it removes transparency from the State budget. As it is, we already work on shoe string budgets now, meeting unfunded State licensing mandates, NAEYC mandates and School Readiness mandates. Although many of our teachers hold a BA degree (with large college loans), they are working at or below the poverty level and need state assistance to survive.

I would also like to ask you to please protect the Quality Enhancement funding that is given to the Middletown community. The funds provide 10 free trainings per year which helps our teachers obtain the mandated 20 hours of professional development (again, an unfunded mandate). These funds also help to provide onsite coaching for teachers and the program at large around the mandates, learning experience plans, and general early childhood best practices. These services are invaluable and we can't duplicate them on our already underfunded budget.

We are proud of what we are able to provide for children and families and have made a significant, positive difference in many children's lives, which otherwise would not have had access to quality care and Pre-K education due to costs. Children in our program make gains of 1-2 benchmarks per year and the majority enter kindergarten at a benchmark the OEC has deemed to be developmentally appropriate. Each year, several parents of kindergarteners who formerly attending our program return thanking to us for our efforts to prepare their child for kindergarten. They say the educational and social-emotional preparation is evident as they began elementary school and will continue to make an impact on their journey towards lifelong learning. Please do not take that away from us. Please do not put us in the position where we need to close a classroom, layoff teachers, and worst of all leave families without access to child care and preschool for their children, thus leaving them no choice by to lose their job.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony, and please consider the vast amounts of children, families, and teachers this cut could negatively affect.

Respectfully,

Carly Dinnie  
Assistant Director of School Readiness  
Middlesex YMCA  
99 Union Street  
Middletown, CT 06457  
Ph: 860.343.6227  
[cdinnie@midymca.org](mailto:cdinnie@midymca.org)