Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience with you. My name is Joyce Lewis; I reside in South Windsor; and I am the Interim President & CEO of Key Human Services in Wethersfield. Key Human Services has been providing Birth to Three services to children and families in the Greater Hartford area for 25 years.

I would like to thank you for your long term support of Birth to Three services. Last year, you approved a 1% increase for many human service lines of business, initially including Birth to Three. Providers were extremely grateful for the increase and understandably devastated when the increase was later denied by the OEC and OPM. Why did this happen?

In November, 2017, Birth to Three changed its funding model to a more direct billing model. While this may at some point be the best model, the system design was not complete when we began and it still is not complete and functional. For these reasons, providers continue to bear the burden of the inadequacies of the system and the chaotic funding swings. Sadly, providers’ concerns and predictions have all come true. Overall, revenue has been reduced by more than 30% for most providers. As the systems fail, providers are unfunded, then partially funded, then a victim of unexpected takebacks. Providers certainly did not anticipate the unpredictability of revenue/ takebacks. A catastrophic side effect is the total inability to financially forecast. Providers must have this information for their boards in order to remain in business.

A systemic RFP has been planned for Birth to Three for this fall. How will providers make decisions regarding future participation without any idea of the financial impact? An RFP will be an intolerable additional administrative burden and a distraction from our fiscal need to focus only on services. In listening to the testimony and questions session with Commissioner Bye today, I am struck by the positive comments but lack of questions about Birth to Three. I fully support efforts to bridge the gap between Birth to Three and the start of school at 5. My question is what about the growing gap from 0-5 as Birth to Three services change and expertise leaves the system? The Birth to Three system remains teetering on the brink of destruction. Providers are pressed on every front! Will quality Birth to Three services survive? Who is asking that question?

This is not an idle commentary. Key Human Services Birth to Three may not survive. I know that I have raised this concern in earlier times and yet we are still here. Our presence is solely due to our commitment to the children and families of Connecticut. We are not the only ones on the edge. How will providers survive?

We need fiscal answers and support!
We need adequate funding!
We need systems that work!
We need the opportunity to focus our time, energy and money on services!

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Joyce Lewis