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

My name is Kimberly Paluska and I am the Director of Stepping Stones Birth to Three Program for Harc, Inc.

I want to thank you for your continued support of the Birth to Three program in this budget. 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.

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.

The referral rate for Birth to Three continues to increase (14%) and while providers are seeing more and more children, we are not being paid a fee that reflects our commitment to the families that we serve.

As a Birth to Three Provider in Connecticut serving the Greater Hartford area, we have seen an increase in the number of children receiving a diagnosis of Autism at a rate similar to that of the national trend. Early intervention services such as Birth to Three provide a critical intervention in the development of Connecticut most vulnerable children. The importance of early intervention Birth to Three services is at an all-time high. These services help to create better outcomes educationally, socially and emotionally.

One of our many families’ states that her son Quinn was unable to form words and thanks to Harc’s Birth to Three staff he is a talking at the same developmentally appropriate level of his peers. Quinn is growing in all areas of development especially his confidence and social aptitude and his parents are thrilled with his continued success.

Thank you for your time and support of the Birth to Three program.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Paluska
East Hampton Resident