



Connecticut Community Providers Association

a unified voice for community human service providers

Public Health Committee

March 14, 2007

S.B. No. 1220 (Raised) An Act Concerning The Birth-To-Three Program.

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Alyssa Goduti, Public Policy Manager of the Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA). CCPA represents organizations that provide services and supports for people with disabilities and special needs including children and adults with addictions, mental illness, intellectual, and physical disabilities. CCPA convenes an active Birth to Three Provider Forum, to advocate for and share information with Birth to Three Providers throughout the state.

The mission of the Birth to Three System is to strengthen the capacity of families to meet the developmental and health-related needs of their infants and toddlers who have delays or disabilities. This mission is accomplished to a great extent through a wide network of Birth to Three Community Providers that support infants and their families in their homes or other natural environments with early intervention services including speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and other services.

Birth to Three Funding and Eligibility Criteria:

We strongly support this legislation and the associated funding in the Governor's budget allocated to expanding Birth to Three eligibility. Criteria changes in 2004 disqualified many families from eligibility for Birth to Three Services. This legislation proposes expanding eligibility for these vital services to include very low birth weight newborns (less than 1000 g or 28 weeks gestation or less), infants and children with significant speech delays paired other biological risk factors, and children with mild or unilateral hearing loss and significant speech delays.

Children who are in need of services but are currently ineligible, miss the opportunity to have their developmental concerns addressed in a timely manner. Beginning intervention services at a later stage, when a child reaches school age misses critical times of development and does not take advantage of optimal learning opportunities.

Birth to Three is a program that has had tremendous impact on the children and families it serves. Most notably, over 50% of the children who participate in Birth to Three early intervention programs do not need special education services by the time they reach age 5. Expanding Birth to Three Eligibility is an investment in the future and creates significant long term cost savings to the state in special education costs.

Please support this legislation and the associated funding to support Connecticut's infants and toddlers in need.

Community Provider Funding:

Although we appreciate the efforts to address the needs of infants and children in Birth to Three services this session, we urge you to look at the critical needs of all individuals with intellectual and other disabilities in our state served by community provider organizations. Connecticut's community providers serve nearly 500,000 individuals with disabilities and other significant needs each year. Community providers have been forced to deal with decades of chronic under-funding – funding that has not come close to keeping pace with inflation. That safety net is stretched to its limit and is in need of immediate relief. Our future and the future of the people we serve are at risk. We ask that you adequately fund community providers and help develop a long-term solution to this funding crisis so that community providers can continue to serve people through meaningful programs like Birth to Three.

Thank you for your consideration.