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Family Center of Washington County

FY'19 Testimony on Master Grant Funding

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Stacia Wright and I am a Family Resource Coordinator for the CIS-Early Intervention Program at the Family Center of Washington County. I have been in this position for three years now. When I started, a full caseload was topped at 20-25 children. In the last few years, my caseload has gone as high as 40 children and has not dropped below 30. Referrals have increased by 33% since 2016.

We are struggling to keep pace with referrals, as Early Intervention is not allowed to have a waitlist due to federal special education rules. Due to an ever increasingly high number of referrals and no funding increases over the past 9 years, staffing levels are frozen and children are not receiving the dose of services warranted by child and family need.

This past year, 25% of the new referrals were children that were auto-eligible. This means these children were either medically fragile (ex. Heart condition, Down Syndrome), had severe complications at birth (ex. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, prematurity), or had a diagnosis that could impact development, such as Autism. We do not get paid for evaluations of children that are auto-eligible.

This past year, 34% of our referrals had private insurance. Children's Integrated Services are primarily funded my Medicaid dollars. For regions to draw down their funding they must hit set numbers of Medicaid clients served. This creates great pressure in a system that is mandated to serve all eligible and funding reimbursement that only considers the number of Medicaid clients served. This has created real capacity issues for the service delivery system as a whole and the parent child centers in particular are most vulnerable to these pressures, as they don't have resources or infrastructure to sustain this.

Over the past few years the demands on the Early Intervention Program by the State have also increased. This has made our work more arduous and has made the process for starting services longer. Changes made by the State around evaluations have also put strains on our relationships with the schools and made it difficult for us to get schools the information needed to make transitions smoother. From a service provider stand point these changes seem to be based on siloed thinking and a desire to save a few dollars while not considering the larger picture.

We have also seen an increase in families that need Family Support Home Visiting, which is currently being provided by the Family Resource Coordinators in the Early Intervention Program because we lost our Family Support Home Visitor at the end of September 2017. Since this time,

we have had interviews, but no success with hiring due to the low-pay for a position that requires a Master's degree. Parent Child Center wages and benefits are continually 30% below market rates to comparable positions in education and state government and a recent statewide survey found that 63% of CIS professionals might choose to leave CIS due to low wages.

CIS services are meant to lessen, if not eliminate, the need for future services that are often costlier and less efficient. However, CIS has been level funded since 2009, while referrals continue to go up, service needs continue go up, and cost of living continues to go up, essentially resulting in the defunding, not level funding, of Children's Integrated Services.

Thank you again for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. It is my hope that this committee will decide to invest more in CIS to support our State's families and children.