



Testimony submitted to Joint Committee on Appropriations
August 28, 2020

Investing in our youngest citizens is one of the most important investments we can make for the long-term health of our state. To that end I want to highlight what is not in the budget which is full funding for Children's Integrates Services (CIS), one of the primary mechanisms our state government uses to help ensure optimal development for young children. A cost study commissioned by the Agency of Human Services demonstrates that CIS needs an additional \$2 million to be funded appropriately across the state. This was based on the pre-COVID caseload, and we anticipate this caseload will rise as we pay the price of children and families being isolated, unable to go to school and to work.

Our organization is part of a statewide network of community-based agencies that provide and monitor CIS, which has been level funded for over a decade. This has the effect of cutting services in the face of rising costs such as increases in health insurance. We are unable to compete successfully for the qualified staff we need when our compensation and benefits cannot keep pace with the market. For instance, over the past several years our organization has done an excellent job training developmental educators in early intervention, "special education" for infants to 3 year olds, only to lose them to the school system because we cannot keep pace. Ironically, these special educators may end up working with some children who would not need to continue on to special education over age 3 if Early Intervention through CIS was fully funded. This is a primary example of how underfunding CIS ends up costing the state and taxpayers more in the long run. Children need to learn fundamental skills in early childhood to be successful in school and beyond. When 80% of the brain is developed by age 3 and 90% by age 5, before children even go to kindergarten, CIS is one of the best investments we can make in ensuring children get what they need to succeed.

I understand we are in tight budgetary times, and I am grateful not to see a cut to CIS in the budget. I understand the upcoming fiscal years are potentially very bleak. And I urge you to remember that Children's Integrated Services is a program that will ultimately save us money in multiple ways: keeping children out of special education who catch up developmentally by age 3, supporting families to find and maintain housing through family support, helping families understand and support their children through early childhood family mental health, and providing pre-natal and post-partum services through nurse home visiting. Please consider fully funding CIS now so we do not widen the gap.

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