

Hello, my name is Joanne Fleurrey. I am a Child Care Financial Assistance and Child Care Referral Specialist at the Family Center of Washington County. I am here tonight to ask that you please support the recommendation to fully fund the Parent Child's Centers essential work with families with young children. The base funding for our core services should be \$4 million this year.

I am also here to tell you what this funding helps me give to our community. As a Child Care Financial Assistance Specialist, I assist families with applications for childcare subsidy. The rising cost of childcare can deter families access to registered, licensed and quality care. But the application is not the whole picture. On paper a family may seem not to qualify. But, because I work in a local and easily accessible family center, I meet many of our clients face to face and can communicate directly with them. Through these conversations many times we discover more information that does indeed qualify a family for childcare financial assistance. This means that a young parent can continue to work and contribute to society. Or a parent can go back to school, obtain a new vocational skill, or learn a new trade. This opens more opportunities for employment or a obtain a higher paying job. A child does well when a parent does well. When a parent feels good about themselves through employment or education this translates to a happier and healthier home environment. Communication with families can also bring to light stressors at home that do not come through on a paper application. I can then, do a soft hand off to, our Children's Integrative Services staff that offer additional family supports.

As the Child Care Referral Specialist, I help families in my community find quality childcare. During a childcare referral intake, I gather information about a family and search our database of providers based on the family's criteria. During our conversation, I offer more information to families, especially new families, about what to consider while looking for childcare. Education is an essential part of finding quality care. I tell families about our playgroups and if they are interested, I send them a schedule. Increasing their circle of support. I can ask a family if they are interested in applying for Child Care Financial Assistance. Many do not realize how the income guidelines have increased and it is not only for the working poor. I also stay connected to the providers in our area. Having a good working relationship with the providers, means I know their programs and what may work with families looking for childcare.

Communication, either directly, over the phone or via email, is essential in both of my roles at the Family Center. And that is why I am here tonight, to communicate the importance of your support for S.263 and increased funding for Parent Child Network.

Thank you for your time and have a great evening.