

CIS Testimony – Gov budget hearing

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Thank you for hearing testimony on the Governor's budget. My name is Jill McColgan and I am an Occupational Therapist working in Children's Integrated Service Early Intervention. I am part of a multi-disciplinary team that includes nurses, mental health clinicians, family support workers and specialized child care, and we work collaboratively to support families so they have what they need to help their young children develop optimally.

During the 12 years since the inception of Children's Integrated Services, or CIS, funding for the program has stayed flat while costs and demand have increased. This has led to a loss of capacity to support some of our most vulnerable children and families, increasing the risk of them experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, poverty, and substance use disorders. We know that investing in child development even during the prenatal period pays dividends in the future. For instance, providing speech stimulation to a 2-year-old who is not talking as much as expected is more successful and more cost effective than providing interventions in Kindergarten. The pandemic has only increased the importance of providing services to children under 3. Time is of the essence when it comes to identifying and addressing developmental delays, but, due to the coronavirus, most infants and toddlers spent the spring isolated in their homes, rather than in the settings where concerns are often first flagged. The closure of most child care programs, for example, meant providers were no longer seeing individual children on a routine basis and were thus unaware of their progress—or lack thereof—with respect to developmental milestones. It is even more important that these families and children get services they need as soon as possible at the time in their lives when intervention has the greatest impact.

A study commissioned by the state several years ago determined that the reimbursement rate for CIS was almost 30% below where it needed to be to adequately pay for services. Last year the Legislature increased the rate, the first increase to the program since it began. This is great progress, and we have further to go. The reimbursement rate is still 16% below the recommended level (adjusted for inflation) to cover costs, and an investment of \$1.8 million dollars in the FY23 budget will close that gap. We are so close to fully funding a system of care that gives our youngest citizens the foundation they need to be successful in school and beyond. When 80% of the brain is developed by age 3 and 90% by age 5, it makes sense to put our resources towards supporting optimal child development in these earliest years. When \$100s of millions are spent on public

education for early childhood, before children even get to kindergarten, spending \$13.3 million on Children's Integrated Services sounds like a bargain. Please consider increasing funding for CIS in FY23 so we can give our kids what they need to succeed. Thank you.