

**Public Hearing to receive public comment on Rhode Island's Application
for Federal ARRA Funding to Support the Work of the
Rhode Island Early Learning Council.**

Date: July 29, 2010

Location: CCRI-Warwick Campus – Rooms 1128 & 1130

The hearing was attended by Lorraine Wilby, MaryAnn Crins, Barbara Nardone, Kara Holman, Heather Mayo, Channavy Chhay, Sue Conner, Larry Pucciarelli, Jane Carlson, Jane Ann Conway, Jamie Twesten, Erica Kipferschmidt, Carole Coleman-OHalloran, Monique Smith, Patrice Benoit-Franco, Jim Berson, Patty Carbone, Katie Sudol, Deb Bankauskas, Deborah Milton Masland, Karen Pucciarelli, Tracy Cheney, Sharon Friedman, and Representative Grace Diaz

Testimony was received by: Jim Berson, Sharon Friedman, Jane Carlson, Deborah Milton Masland, Channavy Chhay, Representative Grace Diaz and Patty Carbone.

The hearing was called to order at 5:05 p.m. Early Learning Council Co-chairs Commissioner Deborah Gist and Elizabeth Burke Bryant made brief welcoming remarks.

Jim Berson, Meeting Street: As I stated at a recent policy roundtable that Kids Count hosted, we need to demand accountability in child care centers. We are hopeful that there will be \$300 million in Early Learning Challenge grants that will be available for states to apply for. I suggest that the application you are developing use language from the mark- up to inform Rhode Island's proposal for ARRA funds for the Early Learning council and make sure these align. I have a few other specific points to make regarding Rhode Island's application. (1) It looks like we are thinking of child assessment at kindergarten entry. We need earlier assessments along the developmental trajectory. That way we track developmental progress. (2) Parent Involvement is not visible enough in the draft application. Some of these kids are at home (70% of parents in workforce, 30% are not). How do we engage parents as partners? For whatever reason- what if kids are not eligible for child care? How do we reach them and improve their school readiness? (3) The prenatal period is not mentioned however health births are critical for later school success. Use the high risk birth indicator from the Kids Count Factbook which helps us pinpoint where the most high risk infants are in the state. If we improve birth outcomes we will save lots of money. (4) Kids need to be healthy to be ready to learn so let's not forget about the need for a medical home for every child and the importance of health insurance coverage and child development screenings. (5) There is a lot of emphasis on quality of schools not on child care centers. There needs to be accountability for child care services.

Sharon Friedman, Heritage Park YMCA: Second everything Jim said, align RI Early Learning standards with excellence in Education. Include (in the application) a focus on infant and toddler care as a priority as well as training for infant and toddler teachers. Resources are limited and ability to provide quality care gets more limited due to lack of

resources. How are we getting resources to communities? TEACH will be a wonderful boost but we will need financial support for the infrastructure of child care centers in order to meet payroll and keep child care programs open.

Jane Carlson, Groden Network: I am not a traditional early care and education person— I am a clinical psychologist and behavior analyst. Research and practice for children with autism is reflected in report but could be enhanced and strengthened – particularly in the area of early childhood special education. Be explicit about the need for evidence based practice for special education for children in early years. Establish strong link between early intervention and special ed preschool services. Currently there is not a good transition-Early Intervention focuses on families with young children and when they get to preschool they lose that. Equality and access to high quality, evidence based practices for all young children with special needs should be a goal of the application and the work of the Early Learning Council. Families who are accessing high quality evidence based services tend to be middle class families yet autism is an equal opportunity issue and we need to be sure services for autism reach low income children and families.

Deborah Milton, Director of RIPIN: There needs to be a parent voice on both groups (Council and Work Group).Need to not over look parent piece and perspective. Need to address need of parents, example-. Parents as Teachers which promotes school readiness and lets parents know what to expect when their children start school, encourages reading, literacy, parent involvement. Parent education gets you a big bang for your buck. Transition from early intervention to special education is not easy and parents can get lost in the shuffle. Early learning is the best time to be under one umbrella to move in the same direction. I encourage the Council to improve coordination among early childhood programs and services.

Channavy Chhay, United Way: Three Issues – 1) Higher Education assistance is critical. TEACH is important for populations already on their way to success but not for others with no education. TEACH is one model but is it not one size fits all? 2) Cliff effect for child care – When a parent gets a small raise they sometimes go just over the eligibility threshold for child care and lose their child care assistant. Should we not be encouraging parents to get raises and increase their income? Find ways to maintain their subsidy even when their income increases. More need to be done here. 3) For state budget-child care is always on the chopping block. How do we say don't cut child care? It is part of an industry that is critical to Rhode Island's economic development.

Representative Grace Diaz, Chairperson, Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care: As a former home child care provider I want to talk about the importance of early learning and the potential for children to absorb everything. Their brains are ready to learn and develop. It depends on whose care they are in yet everyone has the potential to provide high quality care if they have the proper training. The Early Learning Council is an exciting opportunity to coordinate in one direction, to review progress, to see where we are going and to set goals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and

for your commitment to ensuring that there is communication and a close working relationship between the Early Learning Council and the Child Care Commission.

Patty Carbone, Sandpipers Early Learning Center: School readiness needs to be defined. We use our own tools in our program but what do we measure this against? We want to do all we can to promote school readiness, but we need the state to define school readiness. Right now if child moves from Newport to Providence the definitions of school readiness may be different and the kind of program that is offered in various child care centers may be different. I hope that the Early Learning Council will work on this and provide guidance about what constitutes school readiness.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.