

New York Zero-to-Three Network

• fostering collaboration among those who work with babies, toddlers and their families •

March 20, 2009

Honorable David Paterson
Governor of New York
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Early Intervention proposed changes

Dear Governor Paterson,

We ask you to reconsider the changes you are proposing for New York State's Early Intervention (EI) program (as stated in Article VII bill, S. 58/A. 158). Thousands of infants and toddlers and their families will lose services and providers under the new regulations for parent fees, income verification, and provider requirements if your budget proposal goes into effect.

Currently, EI in New York State is universally available, confidential, and free to families for all children under age 3. Based on experience in other states, we know that even requiring parents to pay a modest fee will reduce the number of children receiving critical EI services, especially in poor families. Co-pays would burden hard-working families, causing many to discontinue services essential to the sound development of their children. These services not only benefit individual children and parents who need EI, but the community at large. In the long run, they save enormous amounts of money and services, reduce special education costs, increase parent involvement and, according to a solid body of research, produce significantly better outcomes in teenage and adult health, behavior, and productivity.

We are also concerned that other proposed changes to EI will be detrimental to our children. For dually enrolled children in Medicaid and private insurance, requiring providers to claim reimbursements will lead to fewer providers for needy children. Changing eligibility criteria for children who only receive speech therapy would exclude children with significant communication disorders. Establishing new provider fees and approval and re-approval rules will discourage qualified providers.

The new proposal would authorize the State Department of Health to limit the number of providers, based on need, in any one municipality. While there may be adequate numbers of providers overall, often neighborhoods in most need remain underserved. A look at total borough figures for providers in New York City does not reveal the shortage of trained providers in specific low-income neighborhoods confirmed by a 2008 New York Zero-to-Three Network study, *Unequal from the Start: A Check-up on New York City's Infants and Toddlers* (see www.nyzerotothree.org).

EI is cost-effective and based on solid scientific research. We urge you to maintain EI at no cost to families. There is funding in the federal stimulus bill for EI services. We stand ready to work with you to find a reasonable solution appropriate for New York State's youngest residents and families that will set them on the path to school success and productive citizenship. Parents can save for college. They cannot save for the unanticipated costs of having an infant with a disabling condition.

Sincerely,

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Attachment: Petition from Concerned Citizens of New York State (Signatories viewable at: www.thepetitionsite.com/1/Save-Early-Intervention-in-NYS)

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