

Testimony for Legislative Task Force  
Established by House Bill 238:  
At-risk students, Pre-kindergarten, Learning Challenges, & Mentoring

I am testifying today on behalf of children and families in Mississippi. First, I would like to thank the 2007 Legislators for establishing this task force to examine the important issues regarding at-risk students, dyslexia and other related diagnosable learning challenges, early childhood pre-kindergarten programs, mentoring programs and funding for such programs. I am focusing on the issues related to early childhood pre-kindergarten programs, including the need for a statewide child care resource and referral network, implementation of a quality rating system, and grant funding for early childhood pre-kindergarten programs. I have attempted to organize the comments in the order they appear in the bills. I hope this is helpful in reviewing them later.

Senate Bill 2667, from the 2007 Regular Session.

Section 1.3. The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007 addresses the establishment of a voluntary early care and education grant program. The state taken steps in the right direction by establishing this program. Now it is time to determine the criteria for successful application of these grants and to allocate appropriate funding for this worthy endeavor. Every \$1 invested in early childhood can reap a \$7 return. What wise investor would not be pleased with such a high rate of return on their investment? High quality early care and education enables children to enter school ready to learn and leads to more

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productive adult citizens. In addition to promoting cognitive development, social and emotional development is enhanced. Thus, generating both short- and long-term governmental savings and increased tax revenues. Therefore, it is time for this state to follow the lead of many other states in recognizing the economic benefits from investing in young children's early care and education.

Senate Bill 2602, from the 2006 Regular Session.

Section 16 concerns the establishment of the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System to develop and implement a pilot voluntary Quality Rating System (QRS). In addition, this section establishes, subject to appropriation, the creation of a statewide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) system.

Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System. Much like a restaurant or hotel rating system, a child care quality step system provides consumer information regarding the quality of child care programs. This is strongly supported because such a system has been shown to effect change across communities. As increasing numbers of programs volunteer to participate in the QRS, the quality of programs increase and the consumer (families) begins to expect higher quality, thus leading a driving force within the community for more programs to participate in the QRS and increase the quality of their program. Tiered reimbursement of child care certificates (CCDF funds) based on quality ratings will further encourage programs to endeavor to increase quality.

Child Care Resource and Referral. CCR&R's assist parents in choosing child care. In addition, providing parents with education regarding the benefits of high

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quality child care will lead to more families making better choices for non-parental care of their young children. As stated earlier, research shows numerous short- and long-term benefits of high quality early care and education. Furthermore, in as much as CCR&R's will assist with parental decision-making, these agencies can also provide training and technical assistance for child care providers in order to increase program quality. One can look to numerous other states as examples of having utilized CCR&R agencies to increase child care quality in their state. Once again, high quality early care and education will lead to children entering ready to learn and eager to learn.

I would like to thank the legislative task force for this opportunity to speak about issues concerning early care and education availability and accessibility. I look forward to seeing the state implement a statewide QRS and CCR&R network, and making grants available to programs to provide high quality pre-k programs for children in Mississippi.

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