



Alliance for the Betterment of  
Citizens with Disabilities

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## Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

### Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Services Committee

Testimony of Cathy Chin on S3140

Respectfully Submitted, October 7, 2024

Good day, Chairperson Vitale and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Services Committee. On behalf of ABCD, thank you for the opportunity to publicly express our appreciation to the primary sponsors Senators Singleton and Beach and to voice our support of S3140.

ABCD's 14 member agencies which provide Early Intervention (EI) services, served over 65% of all children enrolled in EI during CY 2023.

EI is a family centered evidenced-based model providing physical, occupational and speech-language therapy to infants and toddlers birth to three with developmental delays or disabilities. Since 85% of brain development occurs during the first three years of a child's life, this is a critical window to identify and address delays before they become significant barriers to healthy development. EI's goal is to minimize and prevent permanent disability.

We have the NJ Legislature to thank for our recent rate increases. These increases are an important first step (17,000 children were seen in CY 2023, thousands more than in year's past) but they alone will not solve a problem over 15 years in the making (our wait list remains higher than in 2019). Increasing demand through an expansion of eligibility criteria to include older children or, as they do in Massachusetts, children who are low birth weight, premature, or at risk would create an even more burdensome supply problem.

Undervaluing and underpricing EI over the last few decades has eroded our prestige and talent which has resulted in

- A workforce which continues to choose to work in hospitals, nursing homes and schools which, unlike EI, have been able to keep pace with wage growth.
- Untold numbers of infants and toddlers who have missed a narrow window of opportunity to minimize and prevent barriers to their development, undermining their capacity to realize their full potential.

- Services that have been unavailable to numerous eligible, minority, low income, rural, urban and foster care children.<sup>1</sup>
- A rate of return loss of \$4 - \$9 for every prevention dollar spent.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to expanding eligibility, the state must commit at least as much time to building EI back up and expand our capacity, as it did to wearing it down.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Prenatal to 3; Policy Impact Center. 2023. *Early Intervention Services*. <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2023/us/early-intervention/#:~:text=EI%20Services%20Can%20Save%20States,million%20depending%20on%20the%20state>

<sup>2</sup>Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)