

To: MEIC/ITA Boards and Membership

From: Martha Levine, MEIC/ITA President and Mary Ann Mulligan, MEIC/ITA Legislative Consultant

Re: Advocacy Alert: MEIC Board Votes to Boycott EI Part C Hearings and Stage a Stroller-In at Governor's State House Office on March 1st

Date: February 22, 2010

ADVOCACY ALERT: PLEASE READ THIS ALERT AND DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR EI PROGRAM AND NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS IMMEDIATELY

MEIC Board Votes to Boycott Part C Hearings Set for February 25, and March 1st and Stage a Stroller-In at the Governor's State House Office on March 1st Instead!

The MEIC Board was meeting on Friday when we all received the Public Hearing Notice from DPH. We were shocked when we saw the proposed fee increases which exceeded any fees hikes previously discussed. The proposed fee for a family of 4 making between 300-400% of the Federal Poverty Level represents a 1300% increase (rising from \$60 - \$800). See attached fee table.

The Board felt this notice coming just days before the public hearings was unacceptable and demanded a revised advocacy strategy.

The proposed eligibility changes and fee hikes are draconian and will literally decimate the Early Intervention system that we have all worked decades to build. The impact on families and children with developmental delays will be devastating. This represents a one-two punch to families of children with disabilities - first, the eligibility changes will exclude or deny services to more than one in three children or more than 10,000 children currently receiving EI; second, if the eligibility doesn't cut families out; the massive fees will literally price them out. (Please see revised fee table attached - please note the fees referenced in the Public Hearing Notice are for family of 4 - programs and families need to look at the full table to understand the full impact).

The Board felt that simply attending another public hearing at DPH - our 6th hearing in 3 years - was not enough. We want to be heard loud and clear and we need to send our message to the person responsible for making the ultimate decision on the EI proposed eligibility and fee changes: Governor Patrick.

The Board voted to boycott the hearings and instead ask all of the Early Intervention programs represented by the Consortium and all of our supporters to join us for a Stroller-In at the State House on the same day as the Boston DPH Hearing - March 1st. This will be a brief, peaceful but powerful way to send our message to Governor Patrick.

Stroller-In to Save Early Intervention

March 1st

10 - 11AM

Office of Governor Patrick

Room 360 - 3Rd Floor of the State House

Boston

We will ask families with their children and EI staff and supporters to gather in front of Governor Patrick's office. We will ask to meet with the Governor and we will provide brief remarks to any press covering the event. After the brief program we will ask families and supporters to visit their legislators. We will provide handouts to leave with the Governor and your legislators.

Our message and our goal is clear; We are asking Governor Patrick to pull these proposals off the table and work with the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium on alternative solutions that will not devastate the children who need Early Intervention. The Consortium has outlined a plan that shares the pain and shares the responsibility for addressing the \$10 million Early Intervention budget shortfall. We don't need to balance the shortfall solely on the backs of families. There is a better way that saves Early Intervention and saves the Commonwealth from much higher costs.

Action Needed Now:

1. We need to spread the word about the boycott of the Public Hearings and the alternative Stroller-In. We need to have as many families as possible attend with their children. Some groups and organizations may still want to attend the Public Hearing and that is fine.
2. We are asking everyone to still send written testimony in to Ron Benham and DPH. They still need the written testimony to be included in the written record and submission to OSEP.
3. If families are willing to speak to the press before or at the Stroller-In please contact Mary Ann Mulligan immediately. She will be coordinating our media outreach and strategy.
mamulligan@governmentalstrategies.com cell (617)447-5043 or (617)523-7808 ext.122 office.

We will be sending much more detailed information on the Stroller-In including directions to the State House later today and tomorrow.

Please spread the word about the revised advocacy strategy, start making your plans to come to Boston on March 1st and stay tuned for much more information.

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