

February 22, 2010

Dear EI Supporter:

The Massachusetts Early Intervention system is facing the greatest fiscal challenge since the system was created over 2 decades ago. We need your help now more than ever to preserve essential Early Intervention services. As you may know, Early Intervention is a program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health which provides services to children birth to age three who have or are at risk for developmental delays. State funding supports the 59 EI Programs statewide and is essential to provide services to more than 30,000 children and their families.

The national recession and the state's fiscal crisis and massive revenue shortfall have impacted nearly every state funded program in Massachusetts and Early Intervention is no exception.

The Early Intervention budget is facing a \$2 million shortfall for the remainder of this year and a \$10.5 million shortfall for the next fiscal year starting July 1st. (Early Intervention received federal stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which helped to preserve services over the past 2 years but that funding has run out).

To balance the EI budget deficit, Governor Patrick and the Administration are considering what can only be described as drastic eligibility and parent fee changes that, if implemented, could decimate the Early Intervention system as we know it. The Administration is considering the following:

- Changing the Early Intervention eligibility standard (the delay a child would need to exhibit in order to receive services) from 30% to 40%. Currently, a child needs to exhibit a 30% delay. This has been increased twice in the past five years and is already more than what is required to receive special services in most school systems.
- Implementing a 50% delay standard for children with expressive language delays.
- Raising parent fees approximately 7 times or 700% the current fee and as much as 1,333% for families between 301 and 400% FPG. In the midst of the state's worst recession when families are already struggling to pay their essential bills, this will literally price families out of Early Intervention and have the same effect as eligibility changes.

At least one out of every three children currently receiving Early Intervention services could be impacted if these 3 changes are implemented (10,000 of the 30,000 children currently receiving EI).

Timeline and Action Steps:

The state is poised to implement changes in 2 phases: April 1st and July 1st. We need every Early Intervention supporter to take action now and let Governor Patrick and our elected officials know that this drastic increase in participation fee and changes in eligibility will be devastating for children and families.

DPH has two public hearings scheduled. In addition, the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium is staging a **STROLLER-IN** on Monday, March 1st at the Governor's Office from 10:00 am- 11:00 am for families and all interested parties. If you cannot attend the **STROLLER-IN** or hearings, we encourage you to submit written testimony opposing the proposed changes (see template to assist with written testimony). Written comments may be sent until April 7, 2010.

Please see below for information on where to send written testimony.

Send letters to:

1. Governor Deval Patrick
State House Room 360
Boston, MA 02133
2. Attn: Ron Benhan
DPECSHN
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
250 Washington St., 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02108 – 4619
3. Send a copy of your letter to your local Program Director and/or Martha Levine, President Ma. Early Intervention Consortium mlevine@ne-arc.org and/or Mary Ann Mulligan, mamulligan@governmentalstrategies.com so that we can use your letter when meeting with legislators and DPH officials (Electronic copies preferred)

THANK YOU FOR HELPING TO PRESERVE EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES.

**Martha Levine, Director
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