



Assembly Children, Families and Food Security Committee

Testimony

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The research of Economist and Nobel Laureate James Heckman and his consortium of economists, psychologists, statisticians and neuroscientists shows that early childhood development directly influences economic, health and social outcomes for individuals and society. Adverse early environments create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increase social costs, thereby adding to financial deficits borne by the public.

Arthur Rolnick, also an economist and former Senior Vice President and Director of Research at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank created the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation in 2005 and launched an initiative initially within Minneapolis' most impoverished neighborhoods, now expanded statewide. This initiative was based on the premise that when parents receive coaching on how to nurture their children's development the child, family and society benefit. It focused on at-risk children, defined as having low family income, violence or neglect in the home, low parent education levels, low birth weight and parent chemical addiction. Parents received early childhood development scholarships (for quality child care), prenatal home visits and consistent parent mentoring. The ROI on this initiative was \$16 for each \$1 invested.

The proposed legislation sets the foundation for service coordination at the local community level in a more holistic manner, encouraging creation of opportunity that recognizes and elevates family success, which directly impacts the life trajectory of young children, as Dr. Heckman and the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank's research document.

Our Board of Trustees, based on prevailing and extensive research, took the bold step of prioritizing our investment of time and resources to preventive, evidence-based services for children ages 0-5. UWCJ's mission is to bring together resources for local disadvantaged families to ensure that all young children in our community attain better educational outcomes and a healthier, brighter and more successful future. We've created an integrated system of care and support for the families of young children in our community as well as specific child-focused initiatives, all of which enable families to thrive and are described in the attached Community Report. During calendar 2024, we assisted over 11,000 Middlesex County children, adults and families at no cost to anyone.

This legislation empowers local communities, most familiar with the challenges of its neighbors with the greatest needs to make available the resources and support

necessary for family and children's success: positive family relationships, community connections and preventive services to ensure financial security, quality education, health, safety and permanency. This legislation streamlines the current siloed and fragmented service delivery jungle in each County and an infographic is also included with this testimony.

United Way of Central Jersey is supporting A4365 because it is time for State policy to look to the future, the great potential for child and family success, rather than perpetuating its priority of distress.... attempting to remediate and rehabilitate its citizens for what research documents would likely have been prevented.