

Testimony on House Bill 119
Before the House Human Services Subcommittee
April 10, 2007
Presented by Benjamin W. Kearney, Ph.D.
Vice President and Chief Clinical Officer
Berea Children's Home and Family Services
202 East Bagley
Berea, Ohio 44017
440-260-8304

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee, my name is Benjamin Kearney. I am a licensed Psychologist and the Vice President and Chief Clinical Officer of Berea Children's Home and Family Services, one of the largest providers of mental health services to children and families in Ohio. I would like to take the next few minutes to share with you my experiences with Early Childhood Mental Health Child Care Consultation Services and to urge you to support additional funding for this very important service through the Access to Better Care Initiative.

In 2005, I was asked by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Voices for Ohio's Children to complete an analysis of the continuum of care for early childhood mental health services across the State of Ohio. The published analysis was called "Helping Ohio's Children: Understanding the Impact of Early Childhood Mental Health Services." The analysis determined that Ohio was in the middle of creating a very strong continuum of services across the state for families and their young children. A number of recommendations from that report have either been implemented or are in the middle of implementation. Ohio has made great strides in the provision of services in this area over the last 7 years. We must continue.

Child Care Consultation Services stand as the foundational service in our prevention continuum, the first line of defense against later mental health challenges. It is also the broadest service in our Early Childhood Mental Health continuum offered by over 30 mental health boards throughout the state. Children of every race, culture and socioeconomic level have access to this service.

Who are the children who receive this service? They are children with severe physical and verbal aggression; social isolation and withdrawal; they often have an inability to interact appropriately with peers and adults, an inability to tolerate frustration due to poor coping and social skills; they often possess minimal capacity to bond and attach to others, resulting in poor relationship capacities and poor communication skills. These challenges often produce significant speech and language delays and are complicated because they may live with unreliable /unstable and/or multiple caregivers.

What are the challenges that the families of these children are facing? Childcare providers reported that the families of the children served were impacted by very significant challenges including unstable or inadequate child-rearing environments, single parenting; parental mental health difficulty; poor parenting skills; domestic violence; substance abuse; social and cultural isolation; parents' under-or unemployment; poverty; parents' lack of knowledge about age-

appropriate child development; and finally inconsistent and unreliable parenting, including multiple care givers.

What are the services provided by Child Care Consultation Services? Services include the provision of on-site child/family focused technical assistance to parents, teachers and staff; linking centers and parents with needed resources, such as art therapy, play therapy or physical health referrals; and teaching or supporting training and professional development. Consultants offer interventions for children and respond to the centers' programming needs, which includes providing family enrichment activities and modeling helpful interactions with children.

What were the outcomes that this service produced? Let's look at the Positive Education Program in Cuyahoga County: In fiscal year 2001, PEP's Day Care Plus served 259 children and only six were asked to leave their child care setting. That is an expulsion rate of 2.31%. In fiscal year 2002, PEP's Day Care Plus served 289 children and fifteen were asked to leave their child care setting. They were able to find another setting for six of them. That is a true expulsion rate of 2.08%. In fiscal year 2003, PEP's Day Care Plus served 281 children and eight were asked to leave their child care setting. They were able to find another setting for seven of them. That is a true expulsion rate of 0.36%. In fiscal year 2004, PEP's Day Care Plus served 270 children and seven were asked to leave their child care setting. They were able to find another setting for six of them. That is a true expulsion rate of 0.37%. This is a very powerful outcome because this is exactly what the program was designed to do.

Where are we going? Ohio is on the precipice of being what I believe will be a leading national model of Child Care Consultation. Recommendations have been implemented that call for the collection of common statewide outcomes so that programs can be compared for effectiveness. Plans are in place to provide programs with comprehensive logic models so that not only will we know what is effective, we will know why programs are effective. We will be able to measure a program's fidelity to their service model so that performance and quality improvement processes can be implemented. We will know exactly what programs work, how they work, and for whom they work.

If the funding needs for these services are not met, many children who could have otherwise been maintained in child care will be expelled. This not only causes even greater stress and adjustment challenges to the child who is already functioning poorly, it has great impact on the emotional, physical and financial stress levels of the family. We are not talking about just a family or two. We are talking about thousands and thousands of children and families across the state that will be impacted.

Ohio has a strong and broad early childhood mental health continuum which is just now coming into maturity. This is not the time to begin dismantling or under-funding this continuum. It is the time to invest, invest in the futures of our youngest, most vulnerable citizens. There is no better use of the funds in the Access to Better Care Initiative than this.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for Child Care Consultation Services. I urge you to use funds from the Access to Better Care Initiative to maintain current levels of services for Ohio's children and families. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.