

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 1, 2007

TO: Honorable John H. Lynch, Governor
Honorable Terie Norelli, Speaker of the House
Honorable Sylvia B. Larsen, President of the Senate
Honorable Karen O. Wadsworth, House Clerk
Tammy L. Wright, Senate Clerk
Michael York, State Librarian

FROM: Representative Mary Stuart Gile, Chairman

SUBJECT: Final Report on HB 86, Chapter Law 158:1, Laws of 2007

Establishing a committee to:

- I. Identify and assess all community-based educational and social/human services programs for families with children six years and younger; and
- II. Assess the degree to which existing educational and social/human services programs meet the needs of families with children six years and younger and increase awareness and understanding particularly among families of existing programs.

Pursuant to HB 86, Chapter 158:1, Laws of 2007, enclosed please find the final report and attachments of the Committee to Study Educational and Social Service Programs that Serve Families with Children Six Years and Younger.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

MSG:dm
Enclosures

cc. James Cianci, Esq., Committee Researcher

FINAL REPORT

November 1, 2007

Committee to Study Educational and Social Programs for Families with Children Six years and Younger (HB 86, Chapter 158:1, Laws of 2007)

Members of the Committee
Representative Mary Stuart Gile, Chair
Representative Carolyn Gargasz
Representative Nancy Stiles

PREAMBLE

The goals of HB 86 as a study were to:

- I. Identify and assess community-based educational and social service programs available to NH families with children, 6 years and younger. Specifically for each program/service to determine the following: entity responsible (governance); mission; service area; focus (education/social service); funding, eligibility criteria; number of participants served, (children and parents); and methods of evaluation.
- II. Assess the degree to which existing programs meet the needs of families and children, 6 years and younger and to increase awareness among families as well as legislators of programs offered.

OVERVIEW

The committee met August 1, 22, 28; September 12, 18, 20; October 25, 31, 2007 to meet the charge of the legislation. (Minutes, Appendix A)

The majority of community-based educational and social service programs serving families with children, age 6 and younger are affiliated with two state agencies, namely the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE). There are organizations that the study committee researched and chose to define as "Other" such as Child and Family Services of NH, Easter Seals of NH, Lutheran Social Services of New England, etc. that also provide programs and services for families with children, age 6 and younger. We learned however, that many of their programs are funded through contracts with DHHS. The committee recognizes that there is duplication in the numbers of children reported. We decided to accept the fact that there are children served in multiple programs, who also receive a variety of services from state or selected community-based agencies.

The committee reviewed literature and materials from a variety of sources. A document of special significance to our study was the *Comprehensive Plan for Early Childhood Health and Development for New Hampshire: A Road Map to Collaboration* completed by Maternal and Child Health, DHHS in 2005, and more commonly referred to as the NH Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Study (ECCS).

The committee surveyed parents of children, age 6 and younger through the NH Children's Trust Fund, Family Resource Network and NH Child Care Resource and Referral to enquire as to their perceptions of needs, gaps in services as well as programs that were especially effective. The committee agreed that a matrix format would be the most useful way to communicate the information gathered on programs and services identified. The matrix (Appendix B) includes all programs administered by DHHS, and DOE as well as many of the "Other" administered by state/community organizations. The committee is indebted and most grateful to Catherine Meister, DHHS for creating the matrix and organizing information from DHHS and to Children and Family Law Committee researcher, Attorney James Cianci for completing matrix information from DOE and "Other."

PROCESS

The following are individuals and the agencies/organizations they represented who testified and worked with the study committee. By listing them, the report demonstrates to a degree the depth and scope of information available on educational and social service programs for families with children, age 6 and younger. The committee gives full and grateful recognition to everyone for their contributions to our discussions. The committee minutes (Appendix A) reflect the testimony presented.

SPECIAL GUESTS

Representative Peter Allen, Cheshire/06
Representative Edith Hogan, Hillsborough/25
Representative Barbara Richardson, Cheshire/05
Patti Rawding-Anderson, Easter Seals, NH
Karen Carpenter, Executive Director, NH Children's Trust Fund
Nancy Christiano, Family Resource Connection
Jackie Cowell, Executive Director, Early LearningNH
Mary Heath, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education
Melissa Kelly, Department of Health and Human Services
Att. Jack Lightfoot, Child and Family Services of NH
Catherine Meister, Department of Health and Human Services
Eileen Mullen, Department of Health and Human Services
Joe Perry, Department of Health and Human Services
Laurie Reagan, Department of Health and Human Services
Nichole Reimer, United Way of NH, 211
Myriam Roeder, Department of Health and Human Services
Helen Schotanus, Department of Education
Patricia Waldvogel, University of NH

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING: There are an estimated 87,000 children, (2006), age 6 and younger living with one or two adults, presumably in most cases, their parents. Slightly over 50,000 children, birth through age 5 experience some form of child care and/or early learning opportunity. For example, in 2007:

- 34,000 attend licensed child care;
- 3,000 children attend public preschool;
- 655 attend child care/preschools in NH High School Career Development Programs;
- 1,900 children, infants though 5 year olds, attend Early Head Start and Head Start;
- 10,375 children are enrolled in public school kindergarten;

Title I ESEA provides preschool for 290 children and funds the Even Start program for an additional 150 families with young children;

766 children attend licensed child care/preschool in independent schools and institutions of higher education;

33,800 children with unique and/or special needs, and/or who meet income qualifications, are served by specific bureaus/divisions in DHHS (Matrix, Pages 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 10).

DHHS oversees all licensed child care, private preschools, Head Start and Early Head Start programs as well as services to meet families with young children's unique/special needs. DOE provides oversight of public kindergarten and preschool programs offered in public schools

RECOMMENDATION: The committee completed an extensive study of the NH Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Report Recommendations. The HB 86 committee endorses the recommendations in the report that identify the need to align and coordinate programs and services across fields and disciplines. Further, the committee supports the continuation and expansion of federal funding for Even Start, a family literacy program with proven results.

FINDING: The number, diversity, quality and scope of educational and social service programs for families with children, age 6 and younger is impressive. Many are available based on specific eligibility criteria (income, medical or other special need). Most programs are accessible to any parent based on fees but there is considerable variation in fees charged.

Finding programs and services to fit family needs is challenging. Again, according to the ECCS study, NH needs a centralized and coordinated system of information and referral accessible to all families.

RECOMMENDATION: The committee endorses the United Way 2-1-1 system which will provide a centralized gateway to information on services available to NH citizens and will operate similar to 4-1-1 and 9-1-1. The 2-1-1 system will be implemented on a pilot basis in the Fall of 2007 and expanded to the entire state in 2008. The committee supports state-wide implementation and recommends an aggressive public relations program to inform all families with young children of this valuable service.

FINDING: The NH Home Visiting Program offered to families with newborn for one year has produced positive results, however it is only for parents meeting specific income or need eligibility criteria. Considerable research confirms that quality home visiting programs targeted to children, from birth to age three have the greatest effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION: Expand accessibility to home visiting for all families, and continue services to families with children with unique and/or special needs until the child's third birthday.

FINDING: The Child Well-Being Index used by the NH Children's Alliance is a summary measure compiling town data from seven diverse indicators crossing the spectrum of health, education and economics. Communities are grouped into quintiles with each quintile holding approximately one-fifth of the state's child population. Children born to parents living in communities in the fifth quintile with the lowest number of indicators, face significantly higher risks in their earliest years.

RECOMMENDATION: A follow-up study is needed to determine what services and programs are available in the communities in the fifth quintile, and how families are informed and involved.

FINDING: Parents' surveyed identified high quality, available and affordable child care and after-school programs as highest priorities. Other needs included safe, affordable housing, health

care, better child support laws and educational programs on child development and parenting issues. Parents with access to community family resource centers were unanimous in stating that “every town needs a family resource center.”

RECOMMENDATION: Expand and fund community-based family resource centers. Results of the Chicago Parent Child Centers demonstrate that high quality family resource centers are the most cost-effective in promoting student success in schools.

FINDING: NH has a wealth of programs and talented, experienced professionals working in educational and social service programs for families with children, age 6 and younger. However, the entire array is a patchwork with little coordination and practically invisible to the larger NH community. Programs and resources are like trains on parallel tracks, each going in their own direction, some very effective, others less so. The ECCS report recommends re-establishing a children’s cabinet to address the needs of NH youngest children across systems.

RECOMMENDATION: This committee supports the ECCS recommendation to re-establish a Governor’s Children’s Cabinet and encourages the Governor to take action as soon as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

The committee endorses the findings in this report and supports the implementation of the recommendations. There are multiple educational and social service programs available to families with children age 6 and younger in NH. However, there is a serious need for direction and coordination across agencies and systems. We hope the matrix will provide a useful summary and help promote a more effective delivery of services to our families and young children.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Mary Stuart Gile, Ed.D., Chair