

February 2, 2016

House of Representatives Appropriations Committee Testimony

Hale Ritchie, Board Member, Rainbows United, Inc.

Chairman Ryckman and members of this committee,

I am Hale Ritchie and I serve as a volunteer on the Board of Directors for Rainbows United, Inc. Rainbows serves more than 3,500 children with special needs and their families annually throughout Sedgwick and Butler Counties.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today to share some facts on early childhood and urge your opposition to transferring the administration of Part C of IDEA for infants and toddlers with disabilities, also called *tiny-k* or early intervention services from The Department of Health and Environment, where they are currently administered, to Kansas State Department of Education. For the purpose of my testimony today, I will refer to these services as *tiny-k* infant and toddler services.

I also want to ask your support to preserve the Children's Initiative Fund (CIF) dollars under the Children's Cabinet and Trust. These dollars also have strong oversight and accountability.

The same concerns I have about transferring the *tiny-k* funds mirror similar issues on transferring CIF dollars away from the Children's Cabinet.

- I can tell you from my service through Rainbows, that The Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) is an appropriate place for *tiny-k* infant and toddler services to be administered.
- *tiny-k* infant and toddler services are family focused. As you know, it is very hard for a young child to be successful if their family is not successful.
- *tiny-k* infant and toddler services look at the whole child in every aspect: Physical, Mental Health, Developmental skills, Nutrition, Medical needs, Vision, Hearing, Speech/Language, Nursing, among others. During an initial evaluation, children often qualify for more than one of the 17 mandated services.
- The main reason for this, as pointed out, is there is so much more to providing services to young children with special needs and their families than the educational piece.
- For more than 10 years, KDHE has worked hard to implement evidence-based practices and develop statewide systems making the early intervention network stronger.
- A recent example of this is, in July of 2015 KDHE implemented a new State and Part C provider data software system for capturing early childhood outcomes. This system was successfully implemented in all 36 Networks and should not be wasted.

I want to emphasize, collaboration and community partnerships are keys to the success of *tiny-k* infant and toddler services.

- *tiny-k* infant and toddler services by regulation is payor of last resort. Meaning all other funding sources must be accessed before utilizing these dollars.
- Many of the local networks depend on contributions other than those that flow through the state agencies. At Rainbows, fully 20% of funds are either local, private or non-educational revenues.
- The concern is that funders, like county governments and United Way do not typically contribute to education.
- Over time, Education has taken projects that were originally collaborative in nature into their own organizations. Despite reassurances to the contrary, history proves that the state educational system does not support the types of significant community collaborations now established among most *tiny-k* infant and toddler services networks.
- Under KDHE, *tiny-k* infant and toddler services are able to be shaped in collaboration with local community partners. Each community is able to work together to achieve a family centered service delivery that benefits the individual needs of each child and their family.

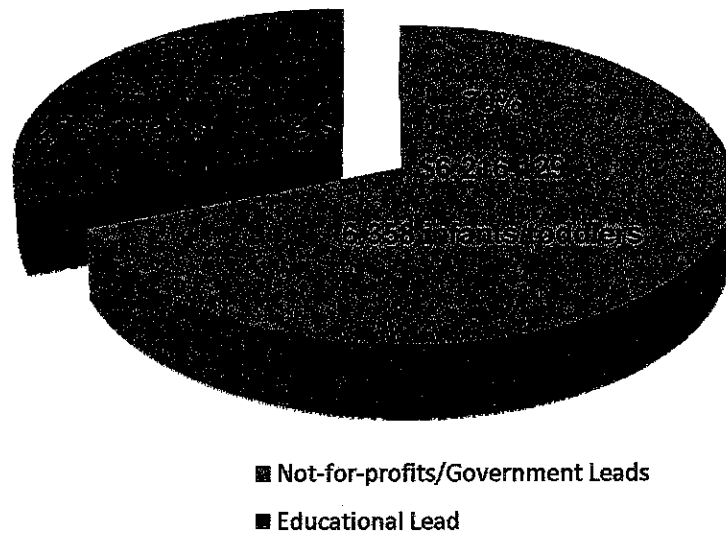
Here are a few statistics about local Lead Agencies. Lead Agencies are the local entity that takes the responsibility to provide services to infants and toddlers within a network.

- Most recent figures show more than half of local *tiny-k* Lead Agencies (19 of 36) are not under the oversight of Education but are governed by a local community agency.
 - Non KSDE Lead Agencies served 70% or 6,358 children in 2014
 - 17 of the 36 networks are with education as lead or co-lead and served 30% or 2,764 children in 2014.
- Many of these lead organizations are not-for-profit and at least one is a County government.
- Two of the largest networks in Kansas have not-for-profit agencies as their Lead Agency Johnson County served 1,486 infants and toddlers while, Sedgwick County served 1,392 *tiny* Kansans in 2014. These two counties serve 32% of all *tiny-k* infants and toddlers.

It is better for *tiny-k* infant and toddler services to remain with KDHE than to be transferred to KSDE. It is also vital to maintain CIF dollars under the Children's Cabinet and Trust for the future of our most vulnerable citizens, including Beckett Miller. You can read how these family focused, early interventions made a difference for him and his family on the last page of my testimony.

I strongly urge you to vote against these proposed detrimental recommendations for our State.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration to these issues.



The funding from Children's Initiative Funds (CIF) and *tiny-k* infant and toddler services federal funds (\$8,934,513) that flow to the networks in 2016 are:

70% (\$6,216,129) for 19 networks who are governed by non-educational lead agencies

30% (\$2,718,384) for 17 networks with education as the lead agency.

Beckett's language has exploded!

Two-and-a-half year old Beckett Miller has been diagnosed with CNS Vasculitis. Beckett's mother, Mandy, remembers what it was like when Beckett was first diagnosed. "Discovering that your child might need services can catch you off guard and be very overwhelming," she says. This condition causes inflammation in the blood vessel walls of Beckett's brain and/or spine which can lead to developmental challenges.

For the past 6 months, Beckett has been receiving services through Rainbows' *tiny-k* Infant/Toddler Services program. He sees both a physical therapist and vision teacher intermittently, but works primarily with Rainbows' Speech-Language Pathologist, Beth Watkins. "Miss Beth has helped Beckett make huge strides." According to his mother, "Beckett is now able to use his tongue on both sides of his mouth, chew equally, and his expressive language has exploded!"

Mandy does not just credit Beth with Beckett's speech improvement. She believes Beth was also instrumental in helping her family discover Beckett's correct diagnosis.

"It took 9 months for Beckett to be accurately diagnosed, and I believe Miss Beth played a huge role in that by helping me to be persistent with navigating such an overwhelming process," Mandy says. "Beth also empowered my abilities as a mother who knows Beckett better than anyone else," Mandy states.

Looking back to the beginning of their journey, the Millers are glad they found Rainbows. "Rainbows works quickly and efficiently," Mandy says. "I always knew we had a team working for Beckett's best interest, which was a huge source of comfort in an uncertain situation. I cannot say enough positive things about our experience."



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