

Senate Finance and Education Committees

Testimony of Kimberly Travers Parent, Summit County

Chairman Carey, Chairman Cates and members of the Senate Finance and Education Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Kim Travers and I am here today speaking as your constituent, a consumer of early care and education and as a mom. Most importantly, I am here as an advocate for families, like mine, who have not yet found their "voice" to speak on behalf of our children.

My family entered the early care and education system in 2003 with the birth of our daughter, Alayna. Alayna was born 2 months early, requiring a month stay in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Alayna was eligible for Help Me Grow services in Summit County. The services we received assisted our family in meeting Alayna's developmental, educational and medical needs. Help Me Grow utilized coaching, mentoring and modeling approaches as a vital part in helping me become a more effective parent.

2006 proved to be a challenging year for our family. Alayna entered preschool the same time that we brought our second daughter, Kierstyn home from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Much to our surprise, Kierstyn was also born prematurely and had many more medical needs. Our family once again looked to the support that Help Me Grow provides to collaborate with us to meet Kierstyn's needs.

Your investment in early care and education was evident to our family as there was an increase in the quality of services that Kierstyn received. It was amazing to me that within 3 years, the breathe and depth of services provided through Help Me Grow were enhanced. I am not saying that everything was perfect, but there was noticeable improvement with room to grow.

The skills that we learned through our involvement in Help Me Grow with Alayna enhanced our ability to meet Kierstyn's challenging developmental, educational and medical needs. Today, Kierstyn is a ball of energy. We had a visit with our pediatrician and Dr. Masterson said to me that she never

imagined that one family would have to face the adversities that we did and still come out on top. My response to her was "we did not face them alone!". If you look at the medical records of my children, you would not expect to see the two smiling girls that fill my life with joy.

Alayna enter kindergarten in the fall of 2008. She is doing very well developmentally and educationally. Although Alayna has a diagnosis of Sensory Integration Processing Disorder, her needs for special education services have been reduced by the early efforts to meet her needs.

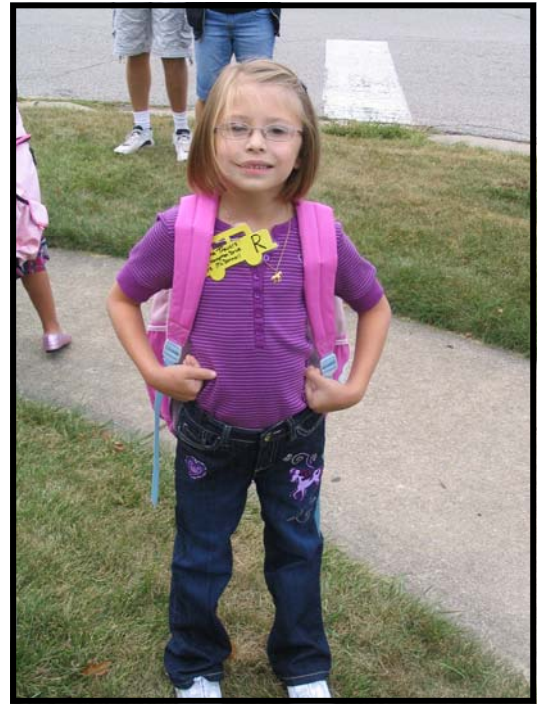
I can now look back on these past 6 years and see that the continuum of services and supports that exist throughout the early childhood system have enhanced the quality of life for my daughters. You have made early care and education a priority for Ohio, and now is not the time to stop investing in these vital programs that produce results like Alayna and Kierstyn's. You may hear or have seen statistics about investing in early care and education, and my family is proof of that data. My children have made tremendous stride due to early childhood intervention services.

Groundwork requests that you restore the \$244 million in cuts to the early childhood system in House Bill 1 to support our youngest children and working families. I would like to concur with this request and encourage you to continue to invest in high quality, research based programs that enhance the future for young families and their children.

I always tell my daughters to "think big and dream boldly!" and I ask you to do the same today. I pray that you never know what it is like to watch your child struggle with climbing the neighborhood slide while her friends go racing up or have to watch her pace the floors because the world around her is too stimulating. But, if you have to face that mountain, I hope that the early care and education system is there for you like it was for me! Thank you for this opportunity and I would welcome any questions that you might have for me at this time.



Alayna, Day 2



Alayna's first day
of Kindergarten



Kierstyn, Day 2



Kierstyn, Age 2



Sisters