

**House Appropriations Article II Subcommittee
TCDD Comments on Funding for Early Childhood Intervention
March 1, 2021**

Chair Capriglione and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony regarding the House appropriations for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services in Texas. My name is Lauren Gerken, and I am a Public Policy Analyst for the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD).

TCDD is established by state and federal law and is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

ECI Promotes Independence and is an Effective Long-Term Investment

Texas ECI serves babies and toddlers between the ages of 0-36 months with developmental delays, disabilities, or a qualifying medical diagnosis. It provides these children and their families with crucial therapies and supports including, but not limited to physical and occupational therapy, case management, and specialized skills training. The unique thing about Texas ECI is that it is provided in the child's natural environment (e.g., their home, daycare, and even their local H-E-B). *Why is this important?* By receiving therapy in their natural environment, babies and toddlers learn how to implement the skills their therapists teach them in their daily lives, promoting independence early on.

As a result of ECI and its methods, children have less need for special education in the future, subsequently providing a return on investment from \$2.50 to \$17.07 for every dollar spent on early intervention services, according to the report "Advocating for Early Intervention in Tight Times" by Alison Whyte.

Proof of ECI's Benefit

I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when I was 18 months old. My parents were told I would never walk, talk, work, or even be able to feed myself. Refusing to accept this, they enrolled me in ECI, where I learned how to walk, quickly learned how to express my opinions – much to my parents' amusement or frustration – and grew up to be an independent, hardworking, tax-paying Texan. I am proud to my tuition as a doctoral student at Texas State University. I humbly assert that I am one example of the effective investment the Texas Legislature makes when they fund ECI.

Recommendation

As Texas continues to explore ways to maximize funding for ECI in accordance with Rider 98, babies and toddlers are using or waiting for the life-changing services ECI provides. The House Appropriations Committee must fund ECI to meet the needs of Texans who are here now, and who have a short, 36-month window to access the therapies and services that will support them. By fully funding ECI, the Texas Legislature will be giving young Texans with disabilities the tools they need to become independent, hardworking, tax-paying Texans, and that is a worthy investment.

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