



FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

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Support Early Steps, Florida's Part C/Early Intervention Program

- **The Council supports continuing the additional 2015 Early Steps funding for services and supports**
- **The Council supports a state and local Early Steps infrastructure that is adequate to ensure the effective operation of this state's early intervention services and meets the federal guidelines for the program.**
- **The Council supports ensuring that appropriate services for eligible children are provided and that more of these services are provided in their natural environment.**

Early Steps is administered by Children's Medical Services (CMS) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. The Early Steps Program provides Florida's infants and toddlers, from birth to 36 months, who have a developmental delay, or a condition that places them at risk for developmental delay, with early intervention services and supports that improve a child's chances to develop to their full potential by achieving their developmental milestones. Research shows that achieving these milestones is essential to developing a child's ability to learn, speak, and move at optimal levels later in life. Early intervention is designed to support families and caregivers in developing the competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop.

During the 2015 Special Session A, Early Steps received \$13 million in additional funding. Child advocates were thrilled by this unprecedented increase in funding. This increase in funding provides an opportunity to ensure that new children referred to the program and children already deemed eligible are receiving all the services they need. Advocates are also looking into using the increase in funding for the provision of more services in the natural environment.

The Council and other advocacy groups are monitoring the effects of changes in the Early Steps State Office due to a large staff reduction and the transition to managed care for children dually enrolled in Children's Medical Services and Early Steps. The Council is communicating monthly with stakeholders to determine if the reduced staff and new administrative requirements for local Early Steps providers is adequate to implement the program. State and local administrators and staff have to oversee the provision of a large increase in revenue and a change in data collection providers without affecting service provision. All this will need to be accomplished while adhering to federal requirements for the program.

Our staff and Council members hear from families whose children have participated in the Early Steps Program and are now young adults who are participating in post-secondary activities and programs. These families attribute their children's success in large part to the early intervention services that their children received when they were infants and toddlers.

As part of a recent study, RAND researchers synthesized what is known from the scientifically sound research literature about the short- and long-term benefits from early intervention programs, the features that are associated with more effective programs, and the economic gains that accrue from investing additional resources in early childhood. Their cost-benefit analyses show that investing in early intervention services has measureable positive outcomes, with a rate of return as high as a seventeen dollars for every dollar spent! For example, if school outcomes improve, fewer resources may be spent on grade repetition or special education classes. Improvements in school performance can lead to subsequent economic success in adulthood and the government will benefit from higher tax revenues and reduced outlays for social welfare programs.