

March 14, 2017

SB 5516 Early Learning Division/Early Learning
Programs Budget
Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee

Co-Chair Smith Warner, Co-Chair Monroe and
Members of Committee

My name is Laura Brown and I am writing this letter to acknowledge and inform this committee about the opportunities Preschool Promise has afforded my family. It has been life changing not only for my immediate family, but also for other parents within my community.

I have a six year old son with moderate/severe Autism Spectrum Disorder and I have a four year old daughter with high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. We live in a small town in a small community, and our only resources before Preschool Promise were Head Start and Early Intervention. My son has been Early Intervention services since the age of three and a half and he was in Head Start with a one-on-one instructional aide last year. He has since transitioned to the local elementary school.

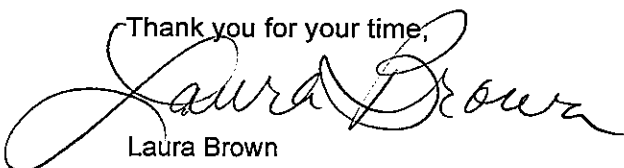
This past school year, even though my family meets the criteria for Head Start and my daughter has a disability, we were informed that we were not accepted at this time for Head Start due to four year olds having priority. This news was devastating to my family because my son made such great progress having access to this program. This access to a program with other children is necessary to my family because I am not native to this community and do not have any family or connections here, so my children do not have opportunities to interact with peers or family. As soon as I received this letter, I contacted Early Intervention, and they gave me an application for Preschool Promise, to which we were accepted.

Due to my children's high level of needs, I have not had the chance to work outside of the home other than weekends, when my significant other was off work, which gave us income, but made it difficult to have quality family time with my children and significant other. I did some volunteer work in my daughter's classroom and was informed of a part-time position within Preschool Promise for an entry-level aide position. I applied and was hired. This opportunity has allowed me to attend trainings that have significantly impacted how I parent my own children with high needs and has given me tools to pass on to other parents who also have children with special needs. This job empowers me to have the ability to help families in the program as well as those outside of it. It is far more to me than just an income.

Preschool Promise has done more for my family than I ever expected. It is more than just a high quality program for my daughter, which was definitely needed, but it has also changed our whole family and the impact of this program in this small community spreads beyond the walls of the classroom. There are not many supports for families of children with high needs in this small community, however I have had the opportunity to share the knowledge I have learned with other parents who do not have access to the education which I am receiving in my job.

I strongly urge you to continue funding Preschool Promise in the coming biennium. This program has meant the world to my family and finally gives an opportunity to families in the community whose children would not have received services otherwise.

Thank you for your time,



Laura Brown