

Jerry Gruba Talking Points
Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee
January 31, 2007

Chairman Hatch, Chairman Foege, members of the Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and to represent the AEAs in providing feedback on division IX of the Children's Healthy Division Initiative. In particular, I have been asked to speak about the section of the bill starting on page 35, line 27, through page 38, line 11

My comments today will emphasize three main points: First that collaboration between the community partners is critical if we hope to meet the needs of the growing number of children and families who need Early ACCESS services; second, that while collaboration is critical, it must be as efficient and simple as possible for the busy AEA and health professionals who serve children and families; and third, that more resources are needed so that we can continue to build the EA system.

AEAs, as regional grantees, are responsible for providing service coordination, and intervention services, to children and families through the EA system. We provide these services through multidisciplinary teams of home interventionists, social workers, speech/language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, hearing and vision teachers, audiologists, and parent educator coordinators.

Equally important, AEAs are responsible for promoting collaboration with signatory partners to improve the infrastructure of the EA system. We take these responsibilities very seriously. However, as the committee is no doubt aware, the number of children and families who need early intervention services is steadily increasing; yet during the past 5-6 years, AEAs have sustained substantial budget cuts which have seriously strained our ability to keep pace with these needs as well as the other educational responsibilities of the AEA system. AEAs need more resources to do what is expected of us, and at the same time, if our signatory partners have more resources and are better able to serve children and families everyone benefits.

In addition, AEAs' staff can do many things for children and families but we must rely on the expertise of the health and medical professionals to complement our strengths. For example, most of our staff do not have health and medical backgrounds (although some do). Therefore, we must rely on our community health partners to help us review and interpret medical records and make recommendations for children who are referred to the Early ACCESS system with existing health and medical needs. Even more importantly, we need to ensure that health partners have the capacity to provide the health services that each child needs.

Thus, the language on pages 35 and 36 of the bill that pertains to "expanding primary, preventative and developmental health services for children..." and "enhanced health practitioner use of developmental screening and surveillance screening..." is welcomed and will enhance the Early ACCESS system.

With guidance and support from the Department of Education, collaboration between the Departments of Public Health and Human Services and Child Health Specialty Clinics and AEAs has increased over that past few years and this means that services to children and families have increased.

Coordination of efforts between agencies is paramount, however, collaboration must be as efficient and simple as possible. Currently, the lead agency is charged with promoting collaboration between the signatory partners. It seems, then, that the health development commission described on pages 36 and 37 of the bill may be redundant with current structures. However, if it is the judgment of the General Assembly to create this commission, then in terms of coordination and collaboration I would respectfully suggest that the AEAs should be represented on this commission. Regardless, the intent behind the commission is appropriate and continued emphasis on enhancing collaboration between the partners would be beneficial.

Again thank you all for the opportunity to visit with you here today.