



December 15, 2010

Chairman Hayes, and all members of the committee—

Thank you for providing this opportunity to share comments today regarding the development of a K-12 financing structure that is equitable and allows all children across our state the opportunity to thrive, and one that features a comprehensive, early-education approach. There is not a more critical issue we face then securing the stability of our children.

I am Sue Williams, Chief Executive Officer for The Children's Trust, the state's designated lead entity for the prevention of child abuse, neglect and unintentional injuries. Our work is grounded through collaborative community partnerships --providing statewide trainings, education opportunities, and direct support for evidence based community programs that work to keep our children safe. By integrating prevention-based models with a basis on strengthening parents and supporting the role of the family, children are safer and families are stronger.

### **Early Education and Child Maltreatment**

In 2008 there were 12,549 confirmed victims of child maltreatment in South Carolina. This puts South Carolina above the national average with 11.8 of every 1,000 children as victims – versus 10.8 nationally.

We know the highest rates of child maltreatment occur prior to the child's fifth birthday and nearly 1/3 of substantiated cases were children under the age of 4. Recognizing the importance of providing outreach to children early in their development, many child abuse prevention initiatives are now directed towards early education. The Children's Trust is also assisting in this effort.

### **Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Education**

Scores of available research from the fields of economics and social sciences indicate that long term fiscal solvency can only be achieved through a combination of cuts and strategic investments into developing greater human capital.

Three years ago, Dr. Jack Shonkoff presented to this committee the long-term effects of stress on the developing young child. Similar longitudinal studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also demonstrate the the life-long impact on adult health as a result of stress and adverse experiences in young children.

Recent testimony provided to the National Deficit Commission from Nobel Prize winning economist, James Heckman noted that comprehensive early childhood development and strong parenting are key to

economic revival: “Ignoring this finding will put our country’s future in peril by producing a deficit of human capital that will take generations to correct.”

These investments stretch beyond a moral imperative—they are the lifeline for South Carolina’s future stability.

### **Growth of 4K in South Carolina**

The Children’s Trust lends our support to the committee draft legislation. However, as the current proposal before the committee is only reviewing the potential growth of 4K, The Children’s Trust urges you to maintain a steward leadership role in promotion of a united network of early learning opportunities. This includes an integrated approach for pre-K, child care and further strengthening evidence based home visiting practices. It is imperative that you consider the entire spectrum of early education beginning at birth.

Further, as the committee considers the draft proposal, The Children’s Trust requests that you strengthen the availability of professional development and training for early education providers. In order to ensure quality performance, this also includes a restoration of site visits for all early-education sites throughout the state.

### **The Recession and Children**

The full impact of the recession upon South Carolina’s children has yet to be determined although we are confident that this will have lasting implications for the coming decade and beyond. State cuts have already had a devastating impact on the state’s core social safety net for those most vulnerable children. Further actions impacting the availability of services places the prosperity of the state in peril and could leave a generation of families behind.

### **Other Considerations**

Last, we must also consider a restoration of the state’s commitment towards the prevention of child maltreatment. In previous years, the state match for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention program served as the **only** supports dedicated towards the prevention of child abuse. The absence of these supports places in jeopardy the ability to maintain advancements and investments currently underway in our communities.

### **Conclusion**

Let’s be clear—a dramatic reduction in child maltreatment in South Carolina is within our reach. Guided by evidence-base practices and a full community integration we can jointly work to ensure our children are safe, secure, healthy and have all opportunities to thrive.

A strong, comprehensive, early educational system integrating parental involvement is vital to achieve this.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.