

## **TESTIMONY FOR SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION**

THANK YOU, CHAIRMAN ROKITA, RANKING MEMBER POLIS, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. I'M BRIGITTE NIELAND, VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, KNOWN AS LABI. I'M HONORED TO BE HERE TODAY SPEAKING TO YOU ABOUT A CRITICAL WORKFORCE ISSUE IN LOUISIANA, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

LABI IS THE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION. WE ADVOCATE FOR FREE ENTERPRISE AND A BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE IN LOUISIANA. WE ARE SUPPORTED BY OVER 2,000 MEMBERS THAT PROVIDE MORE THAN 320,000 DIRECT JOBS FOR LOUISIANA CITIZENS. LABI HAS MADE EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY SINCE ITS INCEPTION 43 YEARS AGO, AS OUR MEMBERS ARE KEENLY AWARE THAT OUR STATE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMPETE WITHOUT AN EDUCATED, READY WORKFORCE.

LABI HAS BEEN ON THE FOREFRONT OF EDUCATION REFORM, ADVOCATING FOR NUMEROUS INITIATIVES THAT ARE STUDENT-CENTERED WITH THE GOAL OF RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND ENDING OUR STATE'S LEGACY OF POOR PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.

THIS YEAR, THE LABI BOARD MADE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY. THEY HAVE DEFINED EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AS A BUSINESS ISSUE. A STATE'S WORKFORCE IS A PRODUCT OF ITS EDUCATION SYSTEM AND IS A MAJOR DETERMINANT IN JUDGING ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS. IT IS A WORKFORCE ISSUE BECAUSE APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE STATE'S EMPLOYEES ARE WOMEN, AND WOMEN STILL HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE.

LABI BECAME INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN THE CHALLENGING ISSUE OF ACCESS TO QUALITY, RELIABLE, AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF TWO FACTORS. FIRST, AFTER YEARS OF EDUCATION REFORM EFFORTS, WE HAVE SEEN ACADEMIC GAINS, YET OUR STUDENT PERFORMANCE IS STILL RANKED IN THE BOTTOM TIER IN THE NATION.

WE BELIEVE THAT IMPROVING SCHOOL QUALITY ALONE ISN'T SUFFICIENT TO ESCALATE LEARNING WHEN CHILDREN BEGIN SCHOOL NOT READY TO LEARN OR ALREADY BEHIND. WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT THE SCIENCE OF EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT INFORMS US HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN AGES 0-3 ARE NOT EXPOSED TO APPROPRIATE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES.

WE SUPPORT QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AS A KEY ELEMENT IN THE OVERALL IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. TODAY'S STUDENT IS TOMORROW'S WORKER. LOUISIANA BUSINESSES WANT TO HIRE LOUISIANA CITIZENS, BUT NOW TOO OFTEN MUST RECRUIT ELSEWHERE DUE TO THE LACK OF AVAILABLE EDUCATED, SKILLED WORKERS.

SECOND, WOMEN CURRENTLY COMPRISE ABOUT HALF AND ARE A STILL GROWING SEGMENT OF LOUISIANA'S WORKFORCE. THE LACK OF RELIABLE, QUALITY PROFESSIONAL CHILDCARE

NEGATIVELY AFFECTS EMPLOYEE ATTENDANCE, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION IMPACTING A COMPANY'S PRODUCTIVITY AND ABILITY TO GROW.

IN MAY 2017, LSU'S PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH LAB CONDUCTED A STATEWIDE SURVEY IN WHICH ALMOST HALF OF RESPONDENTS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, STATED THEY MISSED WORK REGULARLY DUE TO CHILD CARE ISSUES. RESPONDENTS WERE TERMINATED, QUIT JOBS, REFUSED PROMOTIONS, OR CHOSE PART-TIME OVER FULL-TIME WORK DUE TO CHILD CARE CONCERNS. USING THE SURVEY RESULTS, AN ECONOMIST ESTIMATED THAT LOUISIANA EMPLOYERS ANNUALLY LOSE \$816 MILLION DUE TO CHILD CARE ISSUES THAT CREATE ABSENCES AND EMPLOYEE TURNOVER.

EARLY LEARNING IS CRITICAL TO OUR ABILITY TO DO BUSINESS. IN ORDER TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND QUALITY, LOUISIANA HAD ALREADY MADE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE EARLY CHILDCARE DELIVERY SYSTEM. ACT 3 OF 2012 ESTABLISHED A FOUNDATION OF FUNDAMENTAL QUALITY STANDARDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. IT UNIFIED PRESCHOOL, HEAD START AND CHILDCARE PROGRAMS INTO INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY NETWORKS, WHICH OPERATE UNDER A UNIFIED SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS, PARENTAL CHOICE, TEACHER PREPARATION STANDARDS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY. CHILD CARE CENTER RATINGS ARE NOW ANNUALLY RELEASED.

LOUISIANA'S NETWORKS NOW ENCOMPASS 1,600 CHILD CARE, HEAD START, AND SCHOOL SITES SERVING 100,000 CHILDREN, BUT ISSUES OF ACCESS AND QUALITY REMAIN MAJOR CHALLENGES. ONLY HALF OF LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN ENTER KINDERGARTEN READY TO LEARN. LOUISIANA ONLY SERVES 30 PERCENT OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AND LOW-RATED CHILDCARE SITES NEED ASSISTANCE TO IMPROVE. UNFORTUNATELY, OTHER THAN THE ADDITIONAL FUNDING THAT MAY BE ALLOCATED FROM PRESIDENT TRUMP'S PROPOSED BUDGET, IT IS DOUBTFUL THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO EXPAND SEATS.

THE HIGH COST OF QUALITY PROGRAMS, A MINIMUM OF \$10,000 PER CHILD, AND COMPETING STATE PRIORITIES MAKE RELIANCE UPON THE STATE AS THE PRIMARY FUNDER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION EXPANSION UNSUSTAINABLE.

LABI BEGAN WORKING WITH PARTNERS ON A NEW CONCEPT, A COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL THAT EMPLOYS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH UTILIZING EACH COMMUNITY'S STRENGTHS. (CARRIE MONICA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STAND FOR CHILDREN LOUISIANA WILL BE IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM.)

WE WILL SOON CONVENE A WORKING GROUP THAT WILL RECOMMEND UP TO SIX PILOT SITES AND REVIEW DATA FOR EACH AREA. IF THE AREA HAS QUALITY AND UNMET NEED, THE GOAL WOULD BE TO INCREASE CAPACITY. IF THE AREA IS LOW-QUALITY, RESOURCES WILL BE PROVIDED FOR ASSISTANCE. IF THE AREA HAS NO CAPACITY, RESOURCES WOULD BE IDENTIFIED TO OPEN A CENTER "FROM THE GROUND UP."

THIS WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY COLLABORATING WITH THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY, CHILD CARE PROVIDERS, PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS, CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, LOCAL MILITARY GROUPS, GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES, AND OTHER INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS. THIS GROUP COULD BE LED BY A DIFFERENT ENTITY IN EACH COMMUNITY, WHICHEVER HAD THE CAPACITY TO ASSUME A LEADERSHIP ROLE.

AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE PILOT IS A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THESE PILOTS AS COMPARED TO SELECT OTHER DISTRICTS. IF THESE CHILDREN ARE KINDERGARTEN READY AND PREPARED TO LEARN, ON GRADE LEVEL IN GRADES 1-3, AND PASS 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE LEAP WITHOUT REMEDIATION, ADVOCATES WILL HAVE A PERSUASIVE CASE THAT THE COST OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE STATE.

OTHER ESSENTIAL DATA GATHERING ARE WORKFORCE STATISTICS. THE FOLLOWING METRICS COULD BE COLLECTED: WORKER RETENTION, WORKER ABSENTEEISM, WORKER PARTICIPATION, WORKER PRODUCTIVITY, STUDENT ABSENTEEISM, STUDENT PERFORMANCE, STUDENT COMPLETION, STUDENT TRANSFERENCE INTO THE WORKFORCE, AND OTHER RELATED INFORMATION.

WE BELIEVE THAT THE BENEFITS OF A LOCAL APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING ARE MANY. IF SUCCESSFUL, THESE PILOTS COULD BE REPLICATED STATEWIDE, AND THE EDUCATIONAL GAINS COULD CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND CHANGE THE LEARNING LANDSCAPE IN LOUISIANA. THE PEOPLE OUR MEMBERS WILL BE HIRING IN 20 YEARS ARE LIKELY IN CHILD CARE TODAY.