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## Investing in Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and their Families Yields Big Dividends

It has been 34 years since the US Congress added what has become known as “Part C” to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Special Education). This program has become an essential part of a national and state effort to improve educational, social, health, and behavioral outcomes for children born with or at risk for developmental disabilities. Part C created a state/federal partnership to fund early intervention programs through cooperation between state health, education, and social service agencies<sup>1</sup>.

Research over the past 40 years has demonstrated that providing direct, evidence based, and targeted intervention to infants with developmental disabilities – using family members as the primary therapeutic agents – has profound and long-term positive outcomes in physical health, learning, communication, social and mental health. The outcomes result in considerable savings in education, health and social services<sup>2</sup>.

Utah’s Part C program is provided through the Utah Department of Health Baby Watch Early Intervention Program. Services are administered locally by 15 individual providers throughout the state. Baby Watch Early Intervention Program services enhance early growth and development in infants and toddlers, who have developmental delays or disabilities or both, by providing individualized support and services to the child and their family<sup>3</sup>.

However, Part C providers in Utah have been shortchanged with inadequate funding and a cumbersome state management structure that prevents them from maximizing their potential impact. These programs have been level funded since 2017 when they it received a small one-time funding allocation which was made ongoing in 2018. Prior to that, they were level funded since 2013 while the number of children served increased by more than 34%. In 2019, Utah’s Federal Medicaid contribution to Early Intervention was reduced by \$1 million, due to a drop in the number of insured children enrolled in Utah’s Medicaid program. The network of public and non-profit agencies that provide Early Intervention services have no ability to underwrite these services.

Local programs are at capacity and too many children go without the early intervention services they need. Utah’s Baby Watch Early Intervention Program serves only 2.75 percent of children age 0-3, well below the national average of 4.97 percent. In contrast, 12% percent of Utah school aged children are enrolled in special education services. Without additional funding the developmental needs of young children are simply deferred to the future, when they are more costly and less effective. Governor Herbert has requested a budget allocation of

\$1,545,200 in ongoing funds to support Utah's Baby Watch Early Intervention Program. Without these funds, it is likely that children and families in need of these services will not receive them.

The Center for Persons with Disabilities encourages adoption of the Governor's recommendation. While there are many good causes that deserve state funding, few have as immediate and long-term effects on the well-being of infants with disabilities and their families as an investment in the Baby Watch Early Intervention Program.

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Hebbeler, K., Spiker, D., Bailey, D., Scarborough, A., Mallik, S., Simeonsson, R., & Singer, M. (2007). Early intervention for infants & toddlers with disabilities and their families: participants, services, and outcomes. Final Report of the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS). [http://www.sri.com/neils/pdfs/NEILS\\_Report\\_02\\_07\\_Final2.pdf](http://www.sri.com/neils/pdfs/NEILS_Report_02_07_Final2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Utah Department of Health Baby Watch Early Intervention Program Website. <https://health.utah.gov/cshcn/programs/babywatch.html>