

**From:** [Holly Willman](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Please reinstate support for Early Education  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 08, 2016 3:03:43 PM

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Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

As an Alaskan mother of 3 young children ages 3, 5, and 7, I see the positive impacts early childhood learning every day. The human brain undergoes extraordinary development in the first three years of life as children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn, and reason. Research continues to show the experiences humans beings have during this critical time shapes their beliefs and abilities to achieve in the future.

As a mentor to at risk high school youth, I unfortunately also see the negative impacts that ***not*** having early childhood learning opportunities brings. It deeply troubles me knowing that fewer than half of Alaska's young children start school with all the skills experts say they need to succeed. I witnessed this first hand while volunteering a couple years ago in my eldest child's kindergarten – it was surprising the wide range of abilities the children had from a few being able to read to some who could not recognize the letters in the alphabet. At 5 - 6 years old, this difference is astounding! The teachers in the K-12 system do their best to support every child, however inevitably many children simply do not have the proper foundation on which to build a higher education. The K-12 system tries to keep up however many kids fall through, and end up need more and more costly intervention services to try to bring them around to being contributing members of our communities. It's simple to me – as a society we will pay now, or pay later, but either way it will cost us. Current research continues to show that early preventive intervention is more efficient and produces better outcomes than remediation later in life. Eliminating early childhood investments now increase a child's chances of going to prison later by up to 39%.

I believe access to books is the most critical thing for early childhood learning - "Having as few as 20 books in the home has a significant impact on propelling a child to a higher level of education, and the more books you add, the greater the benefit." (Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations, University of Reno Nevada). I also believe that community outreach programs like Parents as Teachers provide critical support for new parents who are struggling to survive or work through challenges life throws at them. I understand this personally as after the birth of two healthy children, our third child had many undiagnosed medical issues that plagued him for the first 2+ years of his life. With support from groups like Best Beginnings and Parents as Teachers, we have been able to more positively impact our son and all our children's lives to better support their needs as they grow.

Here are a few key pieces of information that make up the business case for the State of

Alaska to invest in early childhood learning:

- Parents as Teachers is an evidence-based, home-visiting model that provides parent education and support to pregnant women and families with children from 0-5. Families participate in two personal visits and a group activity every month. Outcomes are exceptionally positive for school readiness.
- Parents as Teachers participants report improved parent-child relationships, less stress, and increased children's school readiness — all for \$4-5,000 per family per year. It makes economic sense to help these young Alaskans achieve higher potentials!
- In March 2016, 20,904 Alaska children 0-5 will receive an Imagination Library book in the mail, at no cost to their families. This is 39% of all children under 5, down from a high of 44% and continuing to decrease due to the State's FY 2017 funding cut. If the funding is cut in full, Imagination Library will not be able to continue across the State.
- Best Beginnings leverages State funding alongside funding from corporate, foundation, and individual donors to support Imagination Libraries across Alaska. Without State funding, these private dollars may be lost, and less children will have the building blocks in place to begin school ready to succeed.
- One year of Imagination Library books (one every month) costs \$30 per child. This is exceptionally efficient use of scarce resources!
- Alaskan's support early learning: Responding to a statewide survey conducted last September, 71% of 750 **Alaskans said that in current tough economic times, they support investment of state funds in early childhood programs as a strategy for ensuring Alaska's long-term prosperity.**

Early education and learning programs are all about providing opportunities for young children and their families to learn, and these critical programs provide excellent value for the dollar compared to recovery programs later.

**I urge you to please support restoration of this funding to support Alaska's children today, and our future potential tomorrow!!** It is a small but critical investment into efficient programs today that will make an enormous difference in the lives of Alaska's children, and the potential for Alaskan communities to achieve for years to come.

Sincerely,

Holly Willman

Alaskan since 2001, Parent since 2008

Best Beginnings Board Member since 2012