

**Presentation to the WV Early Childhood Planning Task Force
by Kay Goodwin, Secretary, WV Department of Education and the Arts and
Chairperson of the Early Childhood Advisory Council**

May 17, 2013

Good afternoon everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to share with you the tremendous work of the Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia.

As most of you know, the Early Childhood Advisory Council of WV was created by Executive Order under Governor Manchin in 2010. The Council, which replaced the PIECES Advisory Council, received 3 years of funding through the Stimulus in September of 2010 and will continue once that federal funding has been expended.

The Council's membership is dictated by the federal legislation with some additions being made by the Governor. The membership includes representatives from the West Virginia Department of Education (both Pre-K and Special Programs), Head Start, Division of Early Care and Education, Home Visiting, Birth to Three, Higher Education, Business, Labor, and Advocacy.

The Council is tasked with creating a high-quality, coordinated system of services for the early childhood population of our state.

Over the past two and a half years, the Council has made tremendous progress towards this goal. The Council is active, energetic, and effective. There is no way for me to cover all of the activities that the Council has pursued in these short remarks today but I do want to highlight a few.

First Thousand Days

On January 1st, the Council launched a statewide Public Awareness Campaign entitled "The First Thousand Days." This campaign has one goal and one goal only: to raise West Virginians' awareness of the importance of the first three years of a child's life on their future health, happiness, and productivity. The campaign includes television and radio commercials as well as printed materials and a fantastic website. We have included a brochure in your packets today and we hope that you will take a look and visit our website soon.

Community Dialogue to Action Initiative

In April of last year, with the assistance of the WV Center for Civic Life, the Council launched a Community Dialogue to Action Initiative to empower local communities to address the unique needs of their communities' early childhood population. While the Council has provided the materials, training, and coordination necessary to sponsor the forums, the leadership and results are driven and produced by the local communities. The information, suggestions, and action plans will be sent back to the Council to analyze and inform statewide trends, needs, and actions. We have included a Forum guide in your packet today.

Data Gap Analysis

The ECAC Research and Data Committee has recently launched a Data Gap Analysis of all Early Childhood Data Systems in the state. The Council believes that this initiative is one of the most desperately needed in the arena of Early Childhood. One of the biggest obstacles faced by the Early Childhood Community is the lack of a quality data system to track child progress and program effectiveness. While almost all Early Childhood programs and agencies DO collect data for their own reporting, few of those data systems talk to each other (meaning that there is no way to track children through multiple programs.) Therefore, the Data Committee has contracted with a national consulting firm to analyze all state systems collecting early childhood data. The committee will formulate

recommendations on where there are gaps in the data being collected with the ultimate result—better linked data systems.

Higher Education Engagement

The Council is currently working with 2 and 4 year institutions of Higher Education in our state to address gaps in curriculum and standards in the early childhood pre-professional and professional development coursework. The Council will be training faculty on the Early Learning Standards, Infant Toddler Standards, the Revised Core Knowledge and Core Competencies, and in addition, training faculty to ensure that curriculum and content are standardized across programs so that credits and courses easily transfer between institutions. The Council also plans to work to increase access to the needed degree programs around the state.

Those are just a few of the many initiatives that the Early Childhood Advisory Council of WV has taken on in the last two and a half years. There are many more that I look forward to discussing with you in the coming weeks and months.

Julie asked me to also highlight a few of the Early Childhood issues and projects that the Council views as most pressing. Frankly, there are many areas that need addressed but I will highlight the areas of most concern due to our inability to move forward without significant investment. These efforts are not in any particular order because they all intersect and play off of each other. All are needed.

1) Data, Data, Data—This is a phrase that gets stated at least once during every Early Childhood related meeting. West Virginia’s Early Childhood System (or lack thereof) suffers from, frankly, an almost complete lack of usable, longitudinal data. As I stated earlier, every early childhood program collects data for their own reporting needs. However, these different data systems do not “talk” or interact with each other. This means that there is no way to track a child through multiple programs and no way to truly gauge program effectiveness from birth through adulthood. Not only is this bad for our system and our kids, it has, numerous times, meant that we are leaving federal money on the table because WV can’t answer basic data compilation questions about our programs.

For example, during the drafting of the Race to the Top application in 2011, WV was unable to answer even the most basic of data questions. We were not able to answer the question “How many children does your state have participating in an Early Childhood program?” We could tell how many children were enrolled in Head Start and how many children were enrolled in Birth to Three. There was no way to see if any of those children were the SAME child because there is now no way to produce an unduplicated count.

In addition, many programs are not collecting the data that is necessary for WV to make informed policy decisions locally let alone respond to federal proposals. For example, today WV does not know how many children are sitting in Child Care. We can tell how many children each center is licensed to serve (their capacity) but we do not have a true count. This is a major problem for obvious reasons.

As I stated previously, the Council is currently conducting a comprehensive Data Gap Analysis to study our different systems in order to develop comprehensive recommendations for bringing our data to a dependable and usable standard. Building a workable and useable data system will take time and, more challenging, a substantial investment. But until we have funds in place, we will be stymied in our quest for the appropriate—and required—data collection.

2) Quality Rating and Improvement System— The Council is in support of the creation of a Quality Rating and Improvement System. As I’m sure you are aware, West Virginia struggles with a lack of quality child care options for families. The Council believes that a systemic approach to assess,

improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs is desperately needed. As you may or may not be aware, similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS award quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in the State's QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. This is an example of where stakeholders and the professionals in the field have done everything they can do (without significant funding) to work towards this goal: it has been put in state code, a cost analysis has been completed, and planning for the system continues to take place. However, there has been little to no investment put forward to bring this system to fruition. This is an area where this group can have a real impact. Policy makers need to be encouraged and pushed to build this system for the enhancement of all our efforts.

It is worth noting that as recently as yesterday, the US Department of Health and Human Services released proposed revisions to the Child Care and Development Fund that many experts believe is pushing states in the direction of mandatory QRIS. We need to be ready.

3) Comprehensive Approach to serving Infants and Toddlers—Finally, and most importantly, West Virginia must develop a comprehensive approach to serving our infants, toddlers, and their families. For most families in WV, there is no *real* choice for infant and toddler care. Fewer and fewer centers accept infants and those that do are raising their costs rapidly.

This need, more than any of the other initiatives that will be mentioned over the course of the next few months, is complicated. For the infant and toddler population, there is no one program or silver bullet that will suffice. What is needed for a family with two working parents might be different than the services needed for families with a stay at home parent or a family care giver. But all families need services. Truly serving this population requires funding many different programs and guaranteeing that many different services are available to families.

I know that “outside entities” get frustrated when the Early Childhood Community can't state “the one big idea” that will fix this problem. Let me assure you that that isn't because the Early Childhood world “wants too much”, “can't agree on a solution”, or “are making it too complicated.” It is exactly the opposite. It is that we **do** understand the complexities and the solutions. There must be a broad investment in the early childhood infrastructure (such as the data system and QRIS) in order to improve program quality and child outcomes. This infrastructure supporting additional investments in programs and services that support families and their children is what is needed in WV. The Council and I look forward to working with you all to more fully understand these compound struggles and complex solutions in the coming weeks.

I want to thank you for your interest and support of Early Childhood programs and policies in West Virginia. As we all know, Early Childhood Development is not a “feel good” initiative that can be eliminated when the budget gets tight. Early Childhood Development Policies must be seen as an economic development strategy that is prioritized and cultivated.

The Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia is proud of the work that we have done over the past two years but are even more excited about the work that lies ahead.

Thank you.