

To: The Committee on Children
From: Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood,
on behalf of the Connecticut Home Visitation Program Consortium
Date: September 12, 2024
Re: Home Visitation Program Consortium Annual Legislative Report

The Home Visitation Program Consortium respectfully submits the annual report to the Committee on Children, as required by C.G.S. Sec. 17a-22gg – Home Visiting Consortium (*Public Act 15-45 – An Act Establishing a Home Visitation Program Consortium*).

Public Act 15-45 -An Act Establishing a Home Visitation Program Consortium

The consortium shall submit an annual report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report shall include (1) the status of the implementation of the recommendations for the coordination of home visitation programs within the early childhood system provided pursuant to section 17a-22dd of the general statutes, as amended by this act, (2) the level of collaboration among home visitation programs in the state, (3) any recommendations for improvements in the collaboration among home visitation providers and other stakeholders, and (4) any additional information that the consortium deems necessary and relevant to improve the provision of home visitation services in the state.

Leadership of Home Visitation Program Consortium:

Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), has served as co-chairperson since March 20, 2019. The second co-chairperson must be selected by the members.

Visitation Program Consortium Updates:

Home Visiting RFP

The Home Visiting Request for Procurement (RFP) was released on September 1, 2020, and was posted to the OEC and DAS websites. Notification of awards went out in February 2021 and the new Home Visiting contracts began on July 1, 2021, with 18 Home Visiting Programs across the state. These newly contracted programs are focused on the target population as identified in the RFP: pre-natal enrollments, mother and fathers under the age of 20, and mothers and fathers from racial/ethnic communities disproportionately likely to experience adverse birth outcomes. The target population serves as a focal point for prevention services and will continue to support families as part of a continuum of services.

With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic the CT Home Visiting System focused on returning to in-person visits with families as much as possible. With the economic challenges that have risen over the past few years, programs and home visitors are being creative and identifying

alternative situations such as meeting in common public spaces due to unique living situations. Home Visiting programs have also received guidance as they integrate in-person visits back into their practice.

During FY24, 2,817 families were enrolled in the CT Home Visiting System and served by 42 agencies (including subcontractors). These 42 agencies completed more than 45,000 home visits, 36,992 (81%) completed in person and 8,604 (19%) completed virtually. This is a large shift from the previous year and aligns with the close of the pandemic. Additionally, during FY24, the CT Home Visiting System continued to implement Maternal, Infant Childhood Home Visiting ARPA funds across six agencies utilizing four evidence-based home visiting models: Child First, Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families America, and Early Head Start. Through this funding, OEC supported an additional 71 children across 71 households, completing 1,420 home visits, 1,221 (86%) in person and 199 (14%) virtual.

The Sparkler Application

The Sparkler application is an evidence-based, mobile platform available in English and Spanish, and soon even more languages, to help fuel healthy early childhood development through;

- Tracking tools to monitor children’s social-emotional, cognitive, communication, and physical development, including the Ages & Stages Questionnaires;
- Activities that help parents/caregivers support their children’s learning and development. (Sparkler has an activity library of more than 1,500 play based learning activities); and
- Messaging tools to give parents/caregivers the ability to communicate regularly with their service provider for advice and support.

In 2020, the CT Home Visiting System piloted the Sparkler Application with Home Visiting providers in five communities: Stamford, Danbury, Manchester, Bristol, and New Haven. Since those initial pilots we have learned many lessons which were then applied to future efforts. The OEC completed a statewide roll out of the Sparkler application in October of 2021. This rollout raised awareness for the importance of developmental monitoring, promotion, screening and linking to essential services. The OEC continues to build trusting collaborative partnerships between families and early childhood educators.

Sparkler Learning Inc. has partnered with many early childhood providers and parents across the state. Families completed 18,010 ASQ-3 screenings and 5,134 ASQ:SE-2 screenings using Sparkler from May 31, 2022, through May 31, 2024. To date, 27,172 families are enrolled in Sparkler mobile app increasing access to developmental screenings, more than 5,000 play activities, parent tips, and most importantly direct pipeline to 211 Child Development Help Me Grow point of entry for reliable information, resources, and services in our state.

Universal Nurse Home Visiting – Family Bridge

Connecticut received substantial American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding and OEC was approved to allocate \$8 million of those funds to pilot Universal Nurse Home Visiting (UNHV). Universal Nurse Home Visiting pilot launched in Bridgeport in the fall of 2023 and is known as Family Bridge (FB). FB implements the Family Connects model which is the only evidence-based universal home visiting model. Through FB families are offered 1-3 home visits with a registered nurse. Additionally, once the nurse has completed the visits the family, if needed and desired, have the opportunity to work with a community health worker to continue to receive services and referrals that support the family.

Since the launch of the pilot program in Bridgeport there have been 1,545 births at Bridgeport hospital. Of those, 1,320 fit the criteria for the program, meaning they must live within one of the eight catchment-area towns. Of those 1,320, 978 families were reached via phone, email or bedside and 547 of those families scheduled a visit with the Registered nurse. Of all the completed visits, 505 families received one visit, 131 received two visits and 81 received three visits. Additionally of those eligible families to receive services from FB, there were 459 additional completed referrals to the local community health workers.

Family Bridge plans to expand to other regions in a thoughtful and intentional manner to ensure this program reaches its maximum potential and ultimate goal to provide these services to any family who delivers a child in Connecticut. As of early 2024, Family Bridge has begun the planning phase to expand services in the Norwich area. Additionally, Family Bridge is working to secure Medicaid reimbursement for the service provided by the Registered Nurse to sustain the program funding in the future.

Parent Engagement

Looking to the future of the CT Home Visiting System there are opportunities to make enhancements to the services provided to families. OEC will focus on parent engagement to raise parent voices throughout programs and within the agency. To work toward this goal, the Home Visiting Consortium will continue to undergo changes itself. The Home Visiting Consortium statute requires that membership include “four representing families who are receiving services or have received services within the last five years.” This requirement provides parents the opportunity to be heard and become leaders within their programs and communities. OEC values parent input and this is a way to ensure their voice is heard throughout the process. OEC will work over the next year to put in place an enhanced consortium board, with a parent co-chair, that puts parents and providers at the forefront of informing the OEC on systems and best practices within Home Visiting.

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