

Lucinda Burns Testimony (2-3 minutes)**HB13-1291 "Colorado Infant and Toddler Quality and Availability Grant Program****Wednesday, May 1st upon Senate adjournment****Senate Health and Human Services Committee, State Capitol Room 352**

Madame Chair, Senator Kefalas, and members of the Committee – Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 1291. My name is Lucinda Burns, Executive Director of Early Childhood Options, the Early Childhood Council covering Grand and Summit County.

Colorado has established a network of 31 local early childhood councils to collaboratively plan, network, develop resources and implement early childhood initiatives within communities to improve the quality of and access to services for young children and their families throughout the state. These councils are now active in 56 of Colorado's 64 counties.

At Early Childhood Options, our goal is to create a community that supports and empowers all young children and families to reach their social, emotional, intellectual, and physical potential. To have the greatest impact, this important work must start in the child's earliest years, especially for those children most at-risk. We support the creation of this grant program because it will increase quality at existing infant-toddler sites as well as increase the number of infants and toddlers who can be served statewide.

A hallmark of this legislation is the partnership between local early childhood councils and local departments of human services in developing proposals that will result in better alignment of services for low-income children. We appreciate the flexibility this legislation offers local communities to best meet the needs of children and families – whether we choose to pursue quality improvement grants to lower-rated programs, tiered reimbursement to sustain high levels of quality, support increased parental involvement, or a combination of strategies.

Early Childhood Councils have experience in implementing Quality Improvement initiatives, such as School Readiness Quality Improvement programs, and have the infrastructure, processes and procedures in place to assure a high level of accountability for these funds. This grant program is an important step forward in increasing access and promoting higher quality care that will help Colorado's youngest children be better prepared for school. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this legislation.