

**TESTIMONY TO  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING  
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION  
JANUARY 23, 2012**

Submitted by: Steven Sanders, Executive Director

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Chairman Farrell, DeFrancisco, Flanagan, Chairwoman Nolan and Members –

Thank you for this opportunity to present brief testimony and observations about the Governor's education proposals. My name is Steven Sanders. As you know, for many years I sat on your side of the dias. I am now Executive Director of ACTS, Agencies for children's Therapy Services. We are an organization comprised of 24 separate companies from around the State providing Preschool Special Education Services and Early Intervention. As such my testimony today will focus on the governor's proposals regarding preschool special education.

The Governor laments the fact that New York State is providing more services than ever before giving tens of thousands of children with developmental disabilities and learning delays a helping hand and a fighting chance to succeed in school. For every four year old that we enroll in preschool special education with the appropriate services, we make it **MORE LIKELY** that such children will succeed in school, graduate and become independent members of society. And we make it **LESS LIKELY** that more expensive and restrictive school age interventions will be required. Preschool Special Education is not only right and smart, it is ultimately cost effective for the State in so many ways; the same of course is true of Universal Pre-K.

So instead of wringing our hands about the increase in special education services we should be applauding in recognition of how far this state has progressed in the 40 years since the revelations of how developmentally disabled men, women and children languished in places like Willowbrook with few if any services and no hope for any future.

Specially:

- The Governor proposes that school districts whose budgets are already capped at 2% per year assume for the first time 1/3 of the cost of any growth in Preschool Special Education. Let's not be fooled by the justification of this proposal...it is NOT intended to provide school districts with some high minded fiduciary interest. It is designed to cause hard pressed school districts to withhold needed service, because there will be no room in their budgets, lest they be forced to cut other equally important educational programs. The Legislature should not force school districts to decide whether to pay for Preschool Special Education or say, chemistry or math teachers.
- The Governor complains that those who evaluate these toddlers ought not have their organizations provide services. That is like saying if you go to a cardiologist for a diagnosis you cannot be treated by that medical group or hospital. Six years ago I was diagnosed by a cardiologist and was provided lifesaving surgery by the same hospital. I did not consider that to be a conflict of interest but rather a blessing. But beyond this unfounded inference of cronyism the fact is that an evaluator of a toddler **does not and cannot make referrals to service providers.** That is done by others, the municipality or the Preschool Special Education Committee with the parents. The Governor has created a conflict of interest scenario that is in conflict with the facts, and in so doing depriving parents of what may be the most suitable fit for their children.

I will have other remarks to offer next month when these budget hearings turn to Early Intervention. But let me submit this thought: in order for us to be truly successful we need an effective and seamless Early Intervention to Preschool to school age continuum especially for disabled or developmentally challenged youngsters. The longer we wait the more it will cost and the less likely that these very special at risk children can grow and progress to be independent and productive adults.

I thank this Joint Budget Committee for your interest and attention. I fully understand the role that this Governor and all Governors play in clamping down on expenditures, and I do not minimize that need. However, the Legislature and its 212 men and women are closest to the needs of the people and historically have provided desperately needed help and attention to their constituents that one elected statewide official may not always recognize. I was proud to serve in this body for 28 years, and I am still proud today of your work and commitment to the needs of the less fortunate families and children of this State whose best hope for a brighter future again resides in your hands.