

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
SENATE BILL 382,

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Committee Chair and members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 382 would support vital funding for the rapidly growing pediatric Early Literacy program "Reach out and Read".

As an Austin pediatrician, I have been involved as a Board member of the nonprofit support group, Capitol Area Reach Out and Read in bringing ROR to the Central Texas area and witnessed its growth in Austin from two clinics in 1995 to a current 26 clinics. I will give your Committee a background paper of the progress that Reach Out and Read Texas has made to now reach almost 256,000 children annually within Texas.

ROR is a public/private partnership program in which local pediatricians, family doctors and nurses talk to the mother and father at "well child visits", generally in a public health children's clinic, about the importance of reading to the child. Then the doctor writes a prescription for a few minutes of reading each day, and gives the child a book, appropriate for the child's age, beginning at 6 months of age. By the time that the child is ready for school he or she will have a "library" of about 9 or 10 books. This represents, for many children of lower economic means, 9 or 10 times the number of books that they would usually have in their home.

Why is this so important? **THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT PARENTS CAN DO TO PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL IS TO READ ALOUD TO THEM WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG!**

The **PROBLEM** that we face is the fact that, at the present time, one third of children enter school unprepared to learn. And children living in poverty are especially at risk. And, as you know, unfortunately, we have an enormous number of Texas children living in poverty. Recent studies show that children from low income families hear as many as 20 million **FEWER** words than their more affluent peers before the age of four. Universal pre-kindergarten is vital, but far too much time is lost before children enter the classroom.

Reach Out and Read is such an important way for children to hear words early in life and **PREPARE THEM TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL.**

Reach out and Read is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Texas Medical Association, the Texas Pediatric Society, and locally by my Travis County Medical Association.

Thanks for your concern about readiness for school and early literacy.!

