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Early Intervention Services under IDEA Part C: The Need for a Critical Investment in Utah's Children's Future

USU IDRPP Fact Sheet

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Although Utah has historically been a model state for Early Intervention (EI), we have fallen behind over the past 5 years. IDEA requires that *all eligible children* receive evidence-based intervention within 90 days of being identified, but EI programs in Utah face significant challenges in identifying and serving all children because of insufficient funding and personnel shortages.

National research suggests that the prevalence of children under age 3 whose development could improve with EI services is between 16% -18%, but only 3.7% of eligible Utah children under age 3 are served by the Baby Watch Early Intervention Program (BWEIP). The state of Utah funds BWEIP at a dismal rate of 1.7 hours of Early Intervention service per month per child, compared to the national average of 4.7 hours per month per child. Inadequate funding has also led to significant staffing shortages, below-market wages, insufficient professional development, reduced service frequency, and shorter duration of service visits, creating limitations on the scope of services provided to the child and family.

The last time the Utah Department of Health and Human Services and the Utah Legislature increased funding for Utah's Part C Early Intervention programs was in 2017. Much has changed in the world since 2017, and Utah's Early Intervention programs have seen significant increases in the number of children served, but there has been no additional funding to support these increased caseloads. Increased caseloads have overwhelmed existing staff, and wage inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic has made hiring and retaining qualified personnel in Early Intervention programs increasingly difficult because providers are unable to offer competitive wages.

Funding for Early Intervention has one of the best returns on investment in the education and social services sector. Research by the RAND Corporation has demonstrated that the return on investment for each \$1.00 allocated to Early Intervention ranges from \$1.80 to \$17.07. Which, when added up over time, means that states can save from \$1,400 to nearly \$240,000 per child served in Early Intervention. These cost savings translate to millions of dollars annually and mean that fewer dollars must be spent on special education and adult disability services and supports.

The State of Utah must take immediate action to address the crisis at BWEIP including the following:

- **Increase funding for BWEIP:** The state legislature must allocate additional funding to BWEIP to address the growing demand for services and ensure that all eligible children have timely access to quality Early Intervention.
- **Invest in staffing:** The state must invest in recruiting and retaining qualified Early Intervention professionals by increasing salaries and providing professional development opportunities. Annual cost of living increases would be one method to address this issue.
- **Strengthen family engagement:** BWEIP must prioritize family engagement by providing ongoing support, training, and resources to families of children with disabilities. Children from families that are trained by and who work with Early Intervention providers have better outcomes and fewer long-term issues.

Early Intervention services under IDEA Part C represent a critical investment in Utah's children's future. By providing early and individualized support, these services can significantly improve the developmental trajectories of infants and toddlers with disabilities, enhancing their long-term outcomes and contributing to their overall well-being.