Regina Brown, Parent Testimony

Councilmember Johnson Hearing on Early Childhood Education

10/17/2023

Good afternoon. My name is Regina Brown. I live in West Philadelphia and I am the parent to 13 kids. I’d like to testify today on the struggles I’ve encountered as a parent who’s had to advocate for early intervention services for my kids.

Right now I am working to ensure that my two year old who’s been receiving early intervention services continues to get the same resources to support his needs as he transitions services from Child Link to Elwyn. Child Link is a program run by PHMC to coordinate early intervention services for infant and toddlers up to the age of three. Because my son will be aging out of Child Link services, I’ve been talking to his child care provider and Elwyn to make sure that the services he’s received - help that has really benefited his development - will continue.

My son has autism. We were first connected to early intervention services through CHOP, where we found out about an autism study that was being conducted by the Autism Institute. Through our participation in the autism study, my son was diagnosed with autism and speech issues and was subsequently connected to different therapies that help with his development. He gets special instruction, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.

Because Elwyn is a main provider for early intervention services after the child turns three, I’ve been trying to figure out how to make sure he continues to receive services that fit his needs. In my conversations with Elwyn, I know that Elwyn emphasizes educational attainment. They make sure kids are on track to excel when they enter school.

However, my son is very bright. He knows his ABC’s and 123’s. He is great at picking up topics being taught at school. The support he needs is less about educational attainment and more the behaviors associated with his diagnoses that are easily misunderstood and can get him in trouble if he is not supported and the teachers around him don’t have the tools they need to do so. That’s why, I’ve called Elwyn, gone to resource fairs to talk to Elwyn representatives - so I can make sure that the support my son needs to succeed doesn’t go away when he turns 3.

I haven’t been able to get a clear answer, and that’s why I’m constantly worried. I’m scared that he won’t be supported for behavioral issues that, when misconstrued, could get him sent home from pre-school and escalate throughout his K-12 schooling.

That’s what happened to my twins, who are now 12. When they were 3 or 4, I would constantly get calls from the child care center asking me to pick them up. Every time they saw each other, they’d run around and this was too much for the center to handle. I’d have to leave work to pick up my twins and drop them off at my mom’s or my sisters. The child care center said that if my children continued to run around, they would be asked to leave. The fact that my I ran into problems with my child care center because I couldn’t get support for my twins, when they were younger, makes me very worried that I’ll run into the same situation with my two year old.

I’ve even talked to my current day care center to see if they can work with Elwyn so that they can continue working with my son. They said they can’t because Elwyn’s pay rate is different from Child Link and the rules for providers under Elwyn is different from Child Link, and so I feel like it’s up to me to handle.

And it’s a lot for a parent to handle. I no longer make long-term plans about my career because I don’t know what kind of support I’ll need for my son. Will he do ok at school? Will I have to pick him up because he’s been acting up? How can I make sure he’s getting the support he need? All my worrying amounts to a lot of lost income and longer-term stability for my family.

I just want my son to thrive. I want him to receive the supports he needs so that he can succeed in school. The different systems, providers, and services are hard for a family to navigate - and what me and my son needs is transparency and consistency.

That’s why I’m calling on City Council to work with the next administration to appoint leaders at at all the agencies related to early intervention committed to working together so that parents are not having to navigate complex siloes. I also want to urge City Council to encourage the next administration to conduct an assessment of the early intervention system to pinpoint the difficulties of getting services and to promote policies that better support kids like my son.

Thank you for your time.