

**Testimony from:** Bianca Bailey, 5983 Vantage Hwy., Ellensburg, WA 98926

**To:** House Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee

**Date:** January 12, 2012, 1:30-3:30 pm

Good afternoon committee chair and other distinguished committee members, my name is Bianca Bailey and I drove over from Ellensburg this morning to speak with you regarding the proposed cuts to the Working Connections Child Care Program.

I am a working mother of 3 children. Without the subsidy that is provided to my family, I would not be working. Times are difficult right now and I am thankful to have my job, not only because I love it, but because it allows me to provide for my family and to help others.

My family has benefited greatly from the safety net provided to low income families in Washington. Seven years ago, we were jobless with 2 kids and temporarily living with a family member because we lacked a home of our own while we were trying to get on our feet. We received food assistance, TANF and all the benefits that went with it – family medical, childcare, and the monthly cash grant. We used that child care benefit to get to work hunting for jobs, and we succeeded in working toward self-sufficiency. Working Connections is the only benefit we receive today.

It hasn't always been easy to navigate the Working Connections process with DSHS. Over the past few years, although I worked the same job with no changes, DSHS would frequently require new paperwork and approval every 3-4 months, would lose paperwork, and would periodically terminate us causing us to lose our slots in the childcare that had been so good with our children. On another occasion after my husband sustained an injury at work and had to get surgery, we worked closely in advance with DSHS to be able to continue childcare while he was recovering from major surgery. Due to the lack of communication from DSHS to me or the provider despite multiple calls and contacts, however, we were dropped, forced to get

payday loans to pay our provider, and only much later reimbursed the back pay that had been approved.

Despite all this, I'm incredibly grateful to be able to have this benefit. The consistency provided by the HB 3141 pilot of one-year eligibility enabled us to take a breath, work hard, pay our copay and know our children were in a safe and secure place without constantly battling with DSHS. For that one year that my children were authorized, I didn't worry about where the kids were after school, whether or not they were safe walking home by themselves or if the supervision was going to be adequate.

I am one of the lucky ones who continues to receive the Working Connections subsidy. When the last round of cuts were made to WCCC, parents in my own community were forced to make some very difficult decisions about how to go forward. There's not a lot of child care choice in Ellensburg, and I know of at least one center that closed because they lost a lot of their state funded child care families and the parents couldn't afford to pay the standard child care rate. I know of 3 parents that used to qualify for WCCC and no longer do. They can't choose not to work, without it they can't afford to live and would become homeless; so these families leave their children home alone after school for up to 4 hours and use the phone to check in on them. THIS IS AN UNSAFE ALTERNATIVE to quality child care, and does nothing to make sure that children are thriving and ready for school. We worry about someone noticing that every day around the same time this child walks home and is home alone for hours.

Without this subsidy, my family wouldn't be able to work to support ourselves at the level we currently do and we would still need TANF and other state funded programs, however, at this time I am happy to report that we are off all state funded programs other the WCCC. If I lose my subsidy, I will be forced to return to TANF to have some income to pay bills and keep the family fed and housed, then I would have to start the job search process again. However, jobs are scarce and if I find one after losing my subsidy, I may not be able to find quality care in Ellensburg. I realize that the state is in dire straits and needs to make cuts somewhere, I'm just asking that it not be to this program that allows families to work towards sufficiency and also contributes to the economy.