

Testimony from: Nicole Matthews, 18602 SE 268th St., Kent WA 98005.

To: House Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee

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

My name is Nicole Matthews, and I am a single mother of two children in Kent, Washington. I would like to thank the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to tell my story about the importance of the Working Connections Child Care program for my family and our future.

It actually scares me to think where I would be, where we would be without these services or if they were to further be cut or we were to become ineligible for them. I also become aghast to think where we would be if it hadn't been for these services in the first place. Being a single mother of 2 and living in poverty – we are at 75% of the current FPL – I feel bad for all that I can't provide for my children and all the things that we are unable to do, places we are unable to go, and pieces of the "American Dream" that are still missing from our lives. But for me, well, I have come a long way and I can see everything I have been working so hard for just within reach – but I just need to know that all of the things that have allowed me to come this far will not abandon us now or anytime in the future. I believe that better days are ahead and this will get better and easier for all of us – hopefully sooner than later – and that we can all be on our feet, moving forward and enjoying life and that all of this Recession stuff will become nothing more than a bitter memory and I hope we can all learn from these hard times as well.

With both of my children I utilized Working Connections to get them into full-day childcare at Children's Home Society. My 8 year old son was a preemie and had issues from birth, some of which came up later in development and I was unaware of until one of the educators noticed it and alerted me to the possibilities. This allowed me to begin accessing treatment and support services, and along with their help and support we were able to make tremendous progress. He is now in 3rd grade and doing excellent – he is meeting or exceeding standards at his level. My daughter is currently in Head Start and doing excellent as well – she is actually exceeding all expectations and meeting every goal that the educator and I set for her. The providers at Children's Home Society helped my children grow and develop, and gave me the ability to become the parent that I am today.

WCCC has been a literal lifesaver. Without this program my life would essentially stop and I would become stuck and eventually start moving backwards which completely contradicts the progression I have made since starting my employment and education paths. I have been able to get off of TANF and do not desire to ever again receive TANF. In fact, staying out of the welfare system is one of my top priorities. Working Connections also allowed me to obtain employment and I currently have held a position for almost 18 months. I have also completed a certificate program and am finishing an AAS program this quarter with the intent on obtaining a full-time job as a Paralegal as well as continuing my education. I have been a full-time student working 2 part-time jobs (one on campus and the other at the Maleng Regional Justice Center) and I fully intend on obtaining a BA then a Law Degree. I also volunteer as much as possible as I feel it is a great thing to do for one's self as well as their community. ALL of this is only possible because I receive WCCC Subsidies.

Being a severely isolated single mother of 2 it should go without saying just how difficult it is to not only stay on track with all of my education and employment but more importantly to find real quality care for

my children. The care I have had for my kids has been amazing. It allows me to be successful every day because I know they are in a safe environment where they are learning, playing, enjoying their friends, receiving healthy foods & snacks and being incredibly supported by their teachers. I also feel great support from them as well. Sometimes when I have had a hard day it all gets turned around when I go to pick them up because I see the smile on their face and get to hear from the teacher how great they did that day or follow-up on something my child is working on. As hard as I work to be the greatest mother I can be, I can say with complete certainty that without WCCC my children would not be excelling as much nor would they have met all of their goals on time. In fact, they have exceeded their goals early, allowing them to be better than prepared for entering into primary school.

Having WCCC gives me an opportunity to provide my children with the stability and structured environment that they have thrived on which is incredibly important especially in the first 3 years of life. If this care were to be eliminated the effects to them, our family as a whole, would be devastating and I believe some of it irreversible. I would feel terrible as mom as I would have to see their disappointment/sadness in not being able to return to the place they enjoy and need – I would also find it enormously difficult to continue on at my jobs or a full-time job and would have to stop attending school as I would have to turn all of my attention to providing them care during the weekdays because I would have nowhere for them to go. Where they are now works because they are safe and cared for – being a victim of domestic violence and always having a shadow of fear of the perpetrators, keeping my children in a safe environment is one of the most important things to me. If I didn't have WCCC I could not afford the private pay and would have to keep my children home with me.

I urge the committee not to cut Working Connections. Low income families like mine depend on this small subsidy to be contributing members of the economy, make life better for their children, and know that their children are thriving in a safe and supportive environment. We are working hard and taking the steps necessary to get off and stay off state assistance, and pulling the rug out at this point would be devastating to thousands of families.