



The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

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April 4, 2011

The Honorable Phil Berger
President Pro Tempore
N.C. Senate
16 W. Jones St, Rm 2008
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

The Honorable Thom Tillis
Speaker of the House
NC House of Representatives
16 W Jones St, Rm 2304
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

Dear Senator Berger and Representative Tillis:

The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce would like to express its support for North Carolina's Smart Start program. We understand that this year's state budget presents a tremendous challenge, and that many programs are facing unprecedented cuts. It is our hope that North Carolina's nationally recognized Smart Start program will not receive disproportionate cuts nor be severely curtailed in its ability to serve children, families, and their communities, particularly in rural, less densely populated areas with limited resources and infrastructures. Smart Start in smaller, more remote communities has provided a unique and refreshing approach to addressing gaps in services and offering programs that go directly to the heart of early childhood needs.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce released a 2010 report that stated, "Early childhood education has a tremendous impact on the national economic security and viability of the American dream." In North Carolina, 59% of all children under six live in families where all parents work, and each year, early learning programs allow 380,000 parents in our state to work. Smart Start has been instrumental in increasing child care quality since its inception in 1993, and preliminary research released this month by Duke University found that investments in Smart Start generate broad educational benefits.

Here in Dare County, Smart Start is administered by Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County, a local non-profit that was born out of a community State of the Child Conference in 1994. Using Smart Start funds blended with other revenue streams, the organization has been able to invest in our community's children and families through vital and comprehensive support of the child care industry, preventive health programs for young children, early learning and pre-literacy programs, parent education and support, and payment for child care expenses often in flexible ways that meet the needs of our community. Children & Youth Partnership is also a source for information and referrals, receiving calls from parents seeking child care, parenting support, or knowledge about the local child care industry as they consider moving to the area. Dare County is a working county, and the need for stable, quality child care is critical to the success of our work force, especially within our tourism industry. Early childhood programs are vital to economic stability, reducing costly unscheduled absences in the workplace and attracting skilled workers to the area.

The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce and Smart Start both share a goal of building an educated work force that will enhance our community and quality of life for all. It has now been established that the early years between birth and kindergarten are critical periods of time for brain and emotional development, and the foundation that we lay sets the stage for all future learning. A solid investment in early education to support childhood development and working families not only helps a child develop into his/her potential, but also strengthens our economy and community.

We urge you to consider the important economic and educational role that Smart Start plays in local communities across North Carolina, and encourage you to strive to maintain this valuable program that has wisely invested in our most important resource – our future generation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Mann", written in a cursive style.

Robin Mann, Chair
Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce
Board of Directors

cc: Sen Stan White
Rep. Tim Spear
Dare County Board of Commissioners