



Sample Communications

Sample Legislative Testimony

Call for Investment in Jacksonville’s System of Care *Initiative*

Testimony of [Name of Person]
[Title], Jacksonville Children’s Commission
Before the Florida State Legislature, Tallahassee, Florida
[Date]

Thank you Chair [Name], Vice Chair [Name], and members of this committee for allowing me to make the case for increasing investments in Florida services that support healthy childhood development. It is a high priority for our state.

I join you today as a representative of the Jacksonville Children’s Commission, an organization whose capacity to serve the needs of children and families in Duval County has grown dramatically over the past five years, thanks to the strong commitment of the people of Jacksonville. Our city’s residents have embraced a spirit of **shared responsibility**. We are committed to connecting all of our kids with opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

My testimony comes at an exciting time. Jacksonville is one of 15 seaports in the state that are benefitting from a combined total of \$3.5 billion in capital improvements. This investment will reap economic returns for years to come. The state of Florida is making dramatic investments in its tourism infrastructure, and we are now capable of hosting an expected 100 million visitors this year—a record for our city.

At the same time, our city is investing in another kind of infrastructure, one that will also produce significant returns. We are laying **tracks** for childhood development. Just as train cars depend on a sturdy set of tracks to safely transport passengers and cargo, Jacksonville’s children need a connected system of supports to help them develop, learn, and grow. They need coordinated systems that support learning opportunities, mentoring, foster care, and health care. We have been developing this system—what we call a System of Care—in Jacksonville since 2010.

We know that access to this system of care supports children’s brain development. Research shows that the **brain’s architecture** is built in an active, step-by-step process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Just like a sturdy house is built from the ground up, a child’s brain is built from the early years. A weak foundation increases a child’s odds of poor health, involvement with the criminal justice system, and weak job prospects. Strong supports—like those that comprise the

System of Care—during critical periods increase the likelihood of positive outcomes later in life.

In Jacksonville, under this system, case managers help families overcome transportation and cost barriers and make sure that providers, counselors, and schools communicate with each other. We work to identify and coordinate services provided by agencies in Northeast Florida, such as the Children’s Home Society, Jewish Family and Community Services, the Children’s Guidance Center, the Mental Health Resource Center, and *[insert other agencies]* to make sure that all of Jacksonville’s children can access supports when and where they need them.

We’ve made a strong start in building our system; to date, *[number]* of agencies have served *[number]* of children and families, providing *[number]* of referrals, and *[other positive outcomes]*. But we haven’t yet laid all of the tracks our system of care needs. Jacksonville is the largest city in Florida, both in terms of its population and the geographic area it covers, and we need substantial resources to build a network of tracks that is large enough to reach all youth in all of our communities.

We know that investments in our System of Care Initiative will yield high returns. When the project is complete, Jacksonville will be a hub for positive childhood development, a city that leads the state in this area.

The Jacksonville Children’s Commission calls on the Florida state legislature to prioritize investments in our youngest residents to make sure that they are given the best start in life. When our children reach their ***full potential***, we will also realize our ***civic potential***, becoming the state we know we can be.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement. We welcome any questions.