**Zluticky, Cynthia E.**

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Testimony submitted by:
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I wish to enter into the record, the following selected remarks -- Building a Stronger State ... One Community at a Time. These remarks were originally presented to the Wisconsin Association for Home and Community Education (WAHCE), September 18, 2002 by Chancellor Kevin P. Reilly of University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Beyond the current budget crunch and its effects on state agencies, we have many reasons to be concerned about the long-term health of our state's economy. But the role that Family Living Programs plays, as a part of Cooperative Extension, with UW-Extension, is important in any effort to create a healthier climate where businesses and workers can flourish.

Such an effort must begin with the most fundamental building block of our society healthy children, youth and families. Like our counterparts nationwide, Wisconsin families face a myriad of social changes that strain families, undermine the health of our workforce and hinder productivity. Offering education and applied research through our network of Family Living Agents, UW-Extension is giving people the tools to confront some of today's toughest social issues and concerns.

As the father of three teenagers, I recognize that raising a child can be as challenging as it is rewarding. To help parents better prepare for this daunting task, our Family Living Educators offer "Positive Parenting" a series of video-based training modules for parents of children from birth- to elementary-school-age.

I'm doubly proud to note that it was developed collaboratively by Extension faculty at the University of Wisconsin with their colleagues at my alma mater, the University of Minnesota. Of the 250 professionals trained to use "Positive Parenting," more than 80 percent use the curriculum in their work … and in their own homes. Ninety-eight percent said the training improved their ability to work with clients in a variety of settings, including social service agencies, early childhood education programs and health care providers.

That's only one of several programs we employ to improve parenting skills. Let's face it parents who need parenting education the most are the least likely to come to a class. That's why we produce and distribute "Parenting the First Year," an instructional newsletter for new parents.

Working with Kiwanis clubs, hospitals, city and county health departments, and other organizations, this effort has reached approximately 90,000 families, including over half of all new parents in Wisconsin in the past year. In addition, about 73,000 people read it on our website every year, and half of those internet visitors are from Latin America. They use the Spanish language section of our website -- *EL PRIMER AÑO DEL BEBÉ. (EL PREE-MARE ANYO DEL BAY-BAY)*

Parents consistently rate the newsletter as a "very useful" source of child-rearing advice. More importantly, our research shows that parents who received the newsletters were less likely to abuse, spank or slap their children.

Early childhood literacy is another important topic today, and everyone will agree that helping children develop good language skills and an enthusiasm for learning is vital. Yet, children from families with limited incomes may not have regular access to high-quality, age-appropriate reading material.

Addressing this need has brought together members of the Wisconsin Association of Home and Community Education (WAHCE) with educators from two different parts of UW-Extension Wisconsin Public Television and Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs.Together, we have brought the First Book program to 45 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Some 500 HCE volunteer readers, trained by UW-Extension, spend precious time reading to children, and providing them with books to share with their families. I'm proud to report that, since September 2000, WAHCE volunteers have reached over 5,200 children, distributing more than 42,000 books and making a huge impact on the future success of these young people.

Over the years, much of our work has focused on helping people provide nutritious meals on a tight budget. That continues to be an important part of UW-Extension's work today, through the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program or WNEP. The program now covers most of Wisconsin, and last year reached nearly 300,000 people. Over half of those were people who learned more about choosing healthy food for themselves and their families, with special emphasis on eating fruits and vegetables and choosing nutritious snacks.

In many areas, our local Family Living Agents and Nutrition Program Coordinators are involved in monitoring and responding to food security issues involving the availability of nutritionally-adequate and safe foods, and peoples' ability to acquire that food in a dignified way.

Likewise, food safety education is an integral part of our Family Living Programs.

With increased awareness of food borne illnesses and the uncertainty about things like Chronic Wasting Disease in venison, our goal is to keep food safety on the public radar screen all year long. Many people take for granted that families already know this kind of information that is critical to providing a healthy, safe, home. The reality is that many people lack knowledge not only about nutrition and food safety, but about basic financial issues.

If the number of high school teens with cellular phones and new cars is any indication, young people today have money and the ability to spend it freely! Despite the fact that teens in the U.S. spend over $155 billion each year, the average teenager does not know how to manage that money. National surveys show that most high school seniors don't know the basics of budgeting, saving, borrowing and investing. In fact, scores on those surveys have actually declined in the past few years.

UW-Extension, in partnership with the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE), is helping to educate high school students about basic money management and financial planning concepts. Over the past four years, 24,526 Wisconsin high school students have increased their financial literacy by participating in the NEFE High School Financial Planning program, covering:

- Financial Planning,
- Cash Flow Management,
- Saving and Investing, and
- Insurance.

Our data show that graduates of this program learned more about managing their money, better understand how credit cards worked, and improved their ability to track expenses and accumulate savings.

Young people aren't the only ones who need this type of education. Less than one-third of American workers have even attempted to calculate how much they need to save for retirement. That is why UW-Extension specialists and county educators developed "Planning Your Retirement An Investment for Your Future" to help workers in their 30's and 40's plan for retirement. Twelve counties used these materials to teach factory workers, county employees, farmers, health care workers, and others how to develop individualized retirement plans.

Participants learned how to estimate and predict retirement income and expenses more accurately, improved their recordkeeping, spending and savings habits; and learned the advantages of tax-deferred programs like 401-K plans to make their financial assets work harder for them.

Whether it's financial literacy, food security, parenting, early childhood literacy, or any other issue… UW-Extension has the established educational network to address important, contemporary issues.

To achieve sustained economic prosperity, our businesses and industries need a productive, stable workforce that is fully prepared to take up the high-tech jobs and related educational programs of tomorrow.

As I have already said, any effort to reach that goal must begin at home. Workers and residents who do not benefit from a healthy home and community environment simply aren't as productive and happy as those who live in strong communities with robust educational programs.

UW-Extension programs bring the best of our university to cities and towns across this state in ways that enable people to …

- become more effective parents,
- make healthy choices about diet and food safety,
- prepare nutritious meals,
- enhance their economic security, and
- manage their family finances and housing resources.

In turn, these efforts do a lot to build up entire communities and strengthen our whole state.