



Written Testimony Submitted to the Senate Committee on Finance
On Assembly Bill 212
May 29, 2025

Lesley Pittman on behalf of the Waterford Institute

Dear Chair Dondero-Loop and members of the Nevada Senate Committee on Finance,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to provide information regarding Waterford UPSTART and the early childhood education work currently underway in Nevada resulting from AB 348 which was passed during the 2023 Nevada Legislative Session.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2024 Nevada Kids Count Data Profile, 67% of Nevada 3 and 4 year olds are not enrolled in school. Early childhood experts believe this lack of early childhood education correlates with 79% of Nevada 4th graders lack of proficiency in reading and 79% of Nevada 8th graders lack of proficiency in math. Waterford UPSTART is an at-home kindergarten readiness program. It is designed exclusively to fill barriers that we know exist in the ability of Nevada families to access early childhood education for their kids who are preparing to enter kindergarten the following year. These barriers include rural areas where site-based facilities do not exist or transportation hinders early learning services, children who are on wait-lists for other preschool programs, children who don't speak English or would benefit from extra cognitive programming, foster children, places where cultural barriers can lower preschool participation among under-resourced populations and families who simply choose not send their children to site-based Prek.

Using the Waterford Early Learning software, children experience tailored lessons in reading, math and science built on decades of research to help them develop a strong foundation for learning. The program is used at home 15 minutes a day, five days a week and parents/caregivers are supported by coaches who offer guidance and resources tailored to their child's progress. A computer and Internet service is provided free of charge to participating families if needed.

Waterford UPSTART's high-quality curriculum is aligned to Nevada PreK standards, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and endorsed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education. More information on the program and its use throughout the country since its creation by the Utah Legislature in 2009 has been provided in your packets.

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In May 2024, the Waterford Institute was awarded the state contract by the Nevada State Board of Examiners to conduct the Nevada Virtual Early Childhood Pilot Project. This award was received through a competitive RFP process.

Waterford immediately hired a professional recruiter who began working with various community-based organizations throughout the state to find families who met the pilot project's eligibility criteria. By June 30 and the conclusion of the first fiscal year of the program, 395 children were registered. A report required by AB 348 and prepared by the Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services who administers the program was submitted to the Legislature at the end of the first fiscal year and includes information on the demographics of those children enrolled in the program.

Today there are 1,170 children registered in the program. 994 children have received laptops and 474 households have received Internet service. Because we are midway through the program, which coincides with a normal school year, we will have program results on this cohort of participants early this summer.

However, submitted as an exhibit for the Committee's consideration is a combined cohort analysis of the learning gains achieved by 3,000 Nevada children who have participated in UPSTART from 2020-2024 through a variety of funding mechanisms; including privately funded pilot projects targeted towards Southern Nevada Latino families, Clark County Recovery Funds that were granted for programs for rural families and ARP ESSER Evidence Based Summer Enrichment and After-School Programs awarded in partnership with the Charter School Association.

You will find significant learning gains in this combined cohort analysis with the majority of participating children testing at Kindergarten Intermediate or Advanced at the conclusion of the program. In several vocabulary areas, participating children tested at 1st grade levels.

As you continue your work to help increase the number of Nevada children participating in early childhood education, we ask that you continue to support innovative programs like this that allows for the mixed delivery of early childhood education to meet the needs of Nevada families who for a host of reasons are unable or unwilling to access site-based PreK early learning programs for their children.