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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SNJPC SUPPORTS EARLY INTERVENTION WEEK Special-Needs Children Best Served by an Early Start**

**PENNSAUKEN, NJ**—The Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative (SNJPC) today extends its support for resolution SJR-14/AJR-113, a joint bill passed by the New Jersey state legislature that designates the third week of May "New Jersey Early Intervention Week." As the service-coordination provider for the Camden County Early Intervention (EI) system, SNJPC has connected the families of more than 700 special-needs children with the resources to accelerate their development, prepare them for school, and secure necessary in-home therapy.

"We applaud the legislature for promoting greater awareness of the services available to special-needs children," says Leslie Breslau, Director of EI Service Coordination for Camden County. "Some parents do not know the appropriate benchmarks for early childhood development, and many are unaware that their children are entitled by law to a free clinical assessment of their needs."

"By coordinating their access to EI services, we can help parents with every step of the assessment process," says Breslau. "Our service coordinators work with families to arrange in-home assessments with EI specialists, help them navigate the intake system, and conduct regular follow-up reviews to ensure children receive the services and support they need," says Breslau. "Our greatest hurdle is making families aware that the program exists."

The Early Intervention Services (EI) system, a component of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, typically assists families with children who are developmentally disabled, physically handicapped, suffer from cognitive, sensory, or behavioral issues, or who are diagnosed with some form of autism.

"Our 11 case managers assist the families of more than 700 Camden County children from birth to age three," says Breslau. "We handle about 80 referrals monthly, about 80% of which are eligible for EI assistance."

Atlantic City Medical Center,  
City and Mainland Divisions

Cape Regional Medical Center

Cooper Health System

Deborah Heart and Lung Center

Kennedy Health Systems,  
Washington Township Campus

Lourdes Medical Center  
of Burlington County

Our Lady of Lourdes  
Medical Center

Shore Memorial Hospital

South Jersey Healthcare-  
Elmer Hospital

South Jersey Healthcare-  
Regional Medical Center

The Memorial Hospital  
of Salem County

Underwood-Memorial Hospital

Virtua Memorial Hospital  
Burlington County

Virtua West Jersey Hospital  
Voorhees

Although SNJPC does not directly provide therapeutic care, it coordinates access to services, freeing families to concentrate on the most appropriate courses of action for their children.

For some families, like the Sponagles of Erial, New Jersey, the EI Service Coordination program helped them get answers to some nagging questions about the developmental progress of their twin sons. At two-and-a-half, Matthew and Christopher weren't talking as much as other children, and their mother, Nancy, became concerned.

"I thought Matthew was a little shy," says Nancy Sponagle, "but we contacted the EI program anyway. They scheduled an assessment for us immediately."

The EI Service Coordination program linked the Sponagles with clinicians who came to observe Matthew and Christopher in their home. After a thorough evaluation, the twins were found to be eligible for EI services. The Sponagles' service coordinator then met with the family and the therapists to develop an individualized family service plan (IFSP) that prescribed weekly in-home occupational and speech therapy for the boys.

Despite her surprise in learning that her children were not developing normally, Nancy was astonished at the results she observed after only a few months of treatment.

"The EI Services Coordination program made sure we reviewed the boys' IFSPs every three months to make adjustments and track their progress," Nancy says. "You could really see the difference almost right away."

"Matthew used to not make eye contact with you when you spoke to him," says Nancy. "Now he is more focused when you address him and much more affectionate. He gives hugs and kisses and can follow simple commands. Christopher has greatly expanded his vocabulary and likes to sing songs he learns in school," she says.

After observing similar communication delays in their youngest son, two year-old Joseph, the Sponagles also enrolled him in the EI program. With three months of speech therapy, his vocabulary has expanded from zero to twenty words. Results like those have made Nancy a grateful advocate of the program.

"I know a lot of parents feel like there's nothing out there for their children," she says, "but from what I've seen, kids only make progress with the help of Early Intervention services."

Referrals to the program are voluntary. "The only way we heard about the EI Service Coordination program is through friends who had used it," says Nancy. She believes a campaign like Early Intervention Week would have alerted her to seek services for her children far earlier than she did, and hopes that the extra attention will reach other families similarly searching for answers.

To refer a family to the Camden County case management unit (CMU) of the New Jersey Special Child Health Services (SCHS) system, call 856-374-6021. For questions about service coordination, please contact the Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative (SNJPC) at 856-665-6000 or online at [snjpc.org](http://snjpc.org).

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*The Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative (SNJPC) is the state-licensed maternal-child health consortium serving the seven southernmost counties of New Jersey. SNJPC coordinates programs that provide access to perinatal health care, offer public health education, and strengthen families in an effort to improve the perinatal and pediatric health system of the region. On an individual basis, the Cooperative operates wherever its services are needed, always focused on the greater good: improving health outcomes for every mother and baby in Southern New Jersey. For more information about the Cooperative or its services, please call 856-665-6000 or visit [snjpc.org](http://snjpc.org).*