



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee

Public Hearing
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Testimony of Elizabeth C. Brown
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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee, I am here today to testify in support of several bills that seek to enhance educational opportunities for students and also to adjust certain existing school readiness and early reading success grant opportunities.

H.B. No. 5590, An Act Concerning Special Education and Instructional Methods Concerning Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities.

The Commission supports greater attention to teaching special populations, including children with Autism and other developmental delays. Teacher training is key to a quality education for all students, especially students with learning disabilities.

The Commission recommends that you consider including children who are lead poisoned as a category for inclusion in “other disabilities” in order to address the serious development delays of lead poisoned children that often go undetected until serious educational delays surface. Lead poisoning in children causes serious brain damage, and disproportionately impacts children who are poor, minority and living in run down housing. Unfortunately, Connecticut’s Birth to Three system requires a high threshold of 45 micro deciliters of lead to qualify for automatic eligibility for the program. Research informs us that at this high level a child’s brain is seriously damaged and difficult to undo the harm. Specific inclusion of OHI due to lead poisoning would raise awareness of the impact of lead poisoning and help embed in the education system expertise to serve this population.

H.B. 5592, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education

Connecticut leads in providing opportunities for high-quality school readiness opportunities for low-income children. The bill before you recognizes that often there is a shortage of qualified teachers in the field. The Commission supports the intent of this bill and believes it will provide a vehicle to keep teachers who are on the path to full compliance with staffing credentials without diminishing quality standards.

H.B. 5593, An Act Concerning Early Reading Success Grants

The bill seeks to strengthen the accountability of the Early Reading Success Grants dedicated to assisting the Priority School Districts. Connecticut test scores related to reading have not substantially improved over the course of the grant initiative that began in 1998. Last year, the budget did not include funding for the Early Reading Success Grant in the '09 fiscal year. School districts have relied on the grant for several purposes including all day kindergarten, smaller class size, after school programs, and reading specialist. The Commission recommends restoring the full grant, but also put in place additional requirements that would improve the teaching of reading. The Goal 2 Report of the Early Childhood Cabinet has outlined substantive measures to improve reading achievement that can guide the rethinking and implementation of research based programs and teacher training.