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Testimony provided to the Education Committee

S.B. 1114: An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Regarding Education

Submitted by the CT Association for Community Action on February, 2007

Thank you, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Governor's proposed recommendations regarding education. Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are the federally designated anti-poverty agencies. For more than forty years, Connecticut's CAAs have coordinated human services, empowered people to become more self-sufficient, improved communities, and built partnerships to address the conditions of poverty.

Last year Connecticut CAAs provided services that benefited more than 266,000 people and more than 107,000 families, including about 93,000 children. CT CAAs provide a diverse array of services in every city and town. In the area of early childhood education, nine of our agencies served more than 6,300 children aged 3 and 4 through Head Start, DSS Child Care, and SDE School Readiness.

Reducing Child Poverty

Connecticut's response to the urgent reality of child poverty and its adoption of the goal to reduce child poverty by 50% has been bold and imaginative. It is also very encouraging to see the Governor recommend such large increases in school readiness funding and she is to be commended for that. However, our experience of fighting poverty for over 40 years suggests that simply providing improved educational opportunities for young children may not be enough to close the achievement gap and improve their future for avoiding poverty as adults.

CAFCA recommends the following for improving the school readiness and future economic success of low-income children. These recommendations based upon research (see below) of what works to help low-income working families and their children:

- **Invest in quality, full-day/full-year, and comprehensive early childhood education:** Working families need full-day, full-year programs and all new resources should be used only for such programs. Half-day or school-year programs will not meet the needs of our families. Low-income families need additional services to improve health, adult education, job skills, parenting skills, and child development outcomes.
- **Expand state Head Start and Early Head Start funding by $10 million over two years.** This proposed increased will provide services to children on the waiting list and expand Early Head Start services.
- **Don't hurt Head Start programs:** Flat state and federal funding and funding reductions have already hurt Head Start. Increasing reimbursement rates for School Readiness and DSS Child Care without also increasing funding to Head Start will unfairly compete for the best Head Start teachers. Ultimately this hurts the children attending Head Start.
- **Invest in compensatory, comprehensive programs that use the Head Start model:** Expand proven programs that work such as Head Start and Early Head Start, rather than spend precious state resources on new systems and bureaucracies. Expanding Head Start is a cost-effective investment because the programs have comprehensive services and

proven strategies already in place and Head Start has the necessary data and outcome reporting systems already installed.

Reduce Child Poverty by increasing the state's investment in Head Start. The General Assembly will need to carefully target and focus the state's precious resources towards where they will do the most good. That is why we call upon you to expand Head Start and Early Head Start, programs that have been proven to help low-income children and families succeed.

Last year in Connecticut, Head Start served 6,570 three and four year olds and Early Head Start served 439 infants and toddlers. 34,366 children aged 0 to 5 (14%) live below the federal poverty line in Connecticut. This means that more than 25,000 of Connecticut's poorest children and families do not receive the benefits of the comprehensive services offered by Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Connecticut.

All CT Head Start programs have long waiting lists. Currently, CAAs that operate these programs have about 365 children on the waiting list and about 310 infants and toddlers on the waiting list for Early Head Start. If we had the funds to serve the families on our waiting lists and open our enrollment to additional families in cities and towns with high poverty rates, we could begin to address the causes and effects of poverty and provide the educational, health and socializing opportunities these families so desperately need.

The success of Head Start and Early Head Start is explained by the vast amount of research conducted on both programs. Both are two-generation programs that serve children and parents. Head Start and Early Head Start seek to promote positive development in children by providing services to the children, supporting parents in their parenting, and promoting the family's self-sufficiency and healthy functioning by providing access to education and job-training activities and health services.

These programs provide activities and services that directly promote children's development. For example, programs are required to provide education, conduct developmental assessments, and encourage parent involvement in child development services and health services. Programs are required to focus on strengthening parenting though activities such as home visits, parenting education, and to develop individualized family partnership agreements that set goals for families and ensure access to needed services and community resources.

The *2005 Head Start Impact Study* found:

- Statistically significant positive impacts for 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children's literacy skills.
- A higher proportion of Head Start parents read to their children more frequently than those parents of children who were not enrolled in Head Start.
- As measured by the ECERS-R scores, Head Start centers were rated as having a higher level of classroom quality than other center-based Pre-K classrooms, state-funded Pre-K classrooms and private Pre-K classrooms.
- Head Start, for the most part, offers a more comprehensive set of higher quality services than state Pre-K programs have.

Funding Reductions have already hurt Head Start
Despite these very positive results, federal Head Start funding was recently cut by 1%, and with level funding for the previous 6 years, it actually represents a reduction of about 11%. **State Head Start funding has been reduced by 19% from 2003 to 2006 when adjusted for inflation**. These cuts have had a serious negative impact on our programs. For example one program had to cut the length of the day from 9 hours down to 6, one program went from a 5 day week to a 4 day week, another program had to close classrooms, and almost all programs have had to eliminate transportation. And, of course, with such cuts it is almost impossible for an anti-poverty agency to provide even a basic cost-of-living increase to our Head Start teachers and aides.

We strongly encourage the General Assembly to think carefully about where they allocate limited resources. We believe that resources for pre-K should be focused on proven models like Head Start and Early Head Start that provide comprehensive family services such as dental, health, literacy and parenting skills.

Research confirms the important role that parents play in a child's education. A recent NYT article by Paul Tough (November 26, 2006) summarized this research: Each child's vocabulary was correlated to one factor: the number of words the parents spoke to the child:

- College-educated parents directed an average of 487 "utterances" to their children each hour; welfare children heard 178 utterances per hour.
- There was a large difference by class in the number of "discouragements" a child heard compared with encouragements: by age 3, professionals' children heard about 500,000 encouragements and 80,000 discouragements; welfare children 75,000 encouragements and 200,000 discouragements.
- Researchers found that language exposure in early childhood correlated strongly with IQ and academic success later.
- Middle class parents raise their children differently that poor parents do, giving them many advantages in confidence in later life.

Simply relying on a part-time educational program that has no family development component will not provide the state with the results that are needed. To reduce the significant disadvantages that poor children start with will require a comprehensive approach that works with parents to improve their parenting skills and life prospects. Low-income families need a full-day/full-year, compensatory model for early childhood education, a model such as Head Start and Early Head Start that supports family development, literacy, parenting education, and empowerment. None of the other preschool options available offer this comprehensive approach to breaking the cycle of poverty. That is why we recommend a significant state investment in Head Start and Early Head Start as the most cost-effective approach to achieving the desired results.

In closing, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our recommendations on how the state should view investments in early childhood education and we look forward to working with you in the future.