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**Testimony in favor of S.B.1114 - An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget
Recommendations Regarding Education.**

Greetings. My name is Joan Cooney. I am speaking as a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice Education Task Force, and am here to ask you to pass Senate Bill 1114.

As I have testified previously before this panel, I am a retired high school mathematics teacher. Many years ago I also taught preschool, kindergarten and first grade. For several years after retiring I also volunteered as a math tutor in an after school program at Weaver and at Hartford Public High School. I am a mother, stepmother, and grandmother. My involvement in the ICEJ Education Task Force has been because of the preschool issue behind which we have been standing which I find to be compelling, powerful, and a real no-brainer. I am motivated both by the extreme need that I have seen as an educator and as an ordinary citizen who reads the paper, and by the gratitude that I feel for the educational opportunities that my own children and grandchildren have enjoyed. While public education is a right afforded to all the children of our country, it pains me to see the vast differences that exist in the quality of the education received, depending on a child's circumstances.

I, along with other members of my organization, was very pleased by the strong commitment to early childhood education shown by Gov. Rell in her proposed budget. It seems to me that when we have a situation where we have a Republican Governor who is willing to take a stand like this and put the money behind it, that we would be very foolish indeed not to strike while the iron is hot. Now is the golden opportunity.

I am sure that you have all been made aware of the many available statistics that powerfully support the need for quality preschool education for all 3 and 4-year-olds, as well as those demonstrating the fiscal wisdom of making such an investment. As you all know, 13,000 Connecticut children are unable at this point to receive these services and with each passing year, thousands are starting first grade already at a significant disadvantage. These children are far more likely to fail, to be held back and/or to drop out of school. They are also at much higher risk for future incarceration. They are far less likely to experience the joy of early learning and success which can lead to a lifetime of learning and succeeding and contributing to our world.

For these reasons I ask you to pass S.B.1114. I also ask that you think of each and every one of those 13,000 unserved little children not as statistics, but as individual precious little human beings who need us, and who are waiting. I hope that you will do whatever lies in your power to step up the pace to get each one of them into a quality program. Thank you.