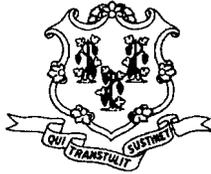


State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Human Services Committee
Public Hearing
March 6, 2007
Testimony Submitted by Elizabeth C. Brown
Legislative Director, COC

Senator Harris, Representative Villano and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on several bills promoting the health, safety and learning of children.

RB 1335 An Act Concerning School Readiness for Homeless Children

The bill before you recognizes the importance of quality early care and education to ensure the healthy development of a child. In Connecticut 33,000 people in CT experience homelessness in a 12 month period; 13,000 of these are children, this equates to 20,000 households in need of housing over the course of a year. Children living in shelters experience the trauma of dislocation and attention is not often paid to their health and educational needs. The bill seeks to establish a grant program to ensure that children living in shelters have access to comprehensive services, including quality educational services and link children and families to referral services in the community for health and early intervention.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership role that the Department of Social Services, Representative Truglia, Representative Hamm and Representative Ruwet is playing in convening an inter-agency group to study the issue by holding community meetings in Torrington, Middletown and Stamford. The goal is to work with communities to develop a comprehensive approach to helping families based on the unique needs of the families in each community. The Commission is pleased to serve on the task force and hope the funds for the grant programs will inform our ongoing work on this critical issue. Hopefully, we can expand this program to make sure each child is appropriately cared for nurtured.

HB 7302, An Act Concerning Rates Paid to Providers Under the Child Care Subsidy Program

Connecticut's Care4Kids Child Care subsidy program is the life line for low income working families. Welfare Reform focused on getting people to work and intrinsic to that was a promise of support systems to ensure child care, transportation and access to job readiness programs. The Department of Social Service Reports that 16,514 children and 9,199 families in 2006¹ accessed the program for child care. This is a precipitous decrease from the 40,000 children enrolled in 2001 when funding reached \$121 million dollars. Care4Kids is in crisis in Connecticut and needs to be reviewed within the broader context of supporting low income working families and not restricted to the confines of the Jobs First Program. With Connecticut's 21 month time limit, families need more support transitioning off of welfare, as well as continued support up to at least 70% of the state median income.

A recent study by the Program Review and Investigation Committee recommends a serious overhaul of the TANF program with attention to raising the outdated payment standard; increasing access to safety net services; increasing funding for job training and education; instituting automatic COLA's; and other measures that would reward participants for work, and not penalize them by cutting off cash assistance immediately but phasing in payments.²

The bill before you will begin to address a fundamental flaw in the system by linking the rate subsidy to the current market rate. Although DSS is mandated to undertake a market rate survey every two years (at a cost of \$62,000 per survey) to determine the fees charged locally by child care centers, there is no requirement to increase the reimbursement rate to reflect the results of the survey. Presently, the 2006 subsidy reimbursement rates for licensed child care providers are based on the 2001 survey, and are currently set at the 60th percentile instead of the recommended 75th percentile.³

In addition, unlicensed care or informal care is tied to the Connecticut's minimum wage and care givers receive one third of the amount or about \$89 dollars per week per child. Despite an increase in the state minimum wage in 2004 and in 2006, the Care4Kids reimbursement rate for full time care would only be \$102 per week per child. It is estimated that an additional \$5 million allocation to Care4Kids is needed beyond the Governor's proposed budget.

With increased knowledge of the importance of the early years on child development especially what we now know about the science of brain development, it is imperative that we ensure that children are in the care of competent, caring adults in both the formal and informal setting. The issue is one of fairness and equity and research tells us that it is

¹ Child Care Report to the TANF Council, 12-13-06

² Legislative Program Review and Investigation Committee Concerning the State's Welfare Reform Initiative, 2006

³ United States Department of Health and Human Services, GAO-02-894, 2002

a sound investment in a child's future. We are grateful to the Governor for recognizing the importance of the quality child care reflected in new dollars for school readiness and Care4Kids. We urge you to build on this wise investment and really maximize this sound investment.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter