



**Testimony to the Committee on Public Health
In Support of Raised House Bill 5306: An Act Concerning the Operation of Child Day Care Centers
and Group Day Care Homes in Public Schools
Submitted by Tracey Lay, Director, School Age Programs & Development Services
EDUCATION CONNECTION**

February 25, 2010

Members of the Committee on Public Health:

My name is Tracey Lay. On behalf of EDUCATION CONNECTION, one of the 6 RESC's (Regional Educational Service Centers), I am here to testify in support of (RHB 5306) An Act Concerning the Operation of Child Day Care Centers/Group Day Care Homes in Public Schools.

I am the Director of School Age Programs and Development Services for EDUCATION CONNECTION. I am responsible for state licensed before & after school programs in 6 school districts that operate throughout western Connecticut in the elementary and middle schools. Our program staff also provides enrichment services, professional development opportunities and consulting services to other agencies/school districts. Our program has been in operation for 20 years and licensed by the Department of Public Health (DPH) Day Care Licensing for that time.

EDUCATION CONNECTION is considered a school district and while our programs can apply for overall legal exemption from DPH licensing because of this status, we choose to be licensed. We feel licensing is important as a base-line for quality standards and vital for the after school field. It has, however, caused our programs much hardship at times.

Over the 16 years I have been with the agency, we have experienced issues with physical plant licensing requirements being unfairly put upon our program. Issues that have arose due to the licensing regulations have been varied in nature and have included minor fixable items and more impactful ones on the program; such as unexpectedly being required to test for lead in any school room the after school program uses. This cost thousands of dollars that was not in the program budget. While it would make sense if there was a hazard to our students and staff, experts have stated that the only danger would be if a young student were to ingest the lead directly. This may be an issue for programs serving younger children who developmentally may be more oral in putting objects in their mouths, which is not the case developmentally with school age students. I have not heard of any case where a school age student bit a wall in a school building. This would be even more unlikely if the students are supervised properly. Another issue was having to transport lamps to and from storage and the program space every afternoon to meet the 50 sq.ft. candles of lighting as required by the licensing regulations. This was not only a nuisance but also seemed more of a hazard by having the extra worry of electrical cords being out of the way of children and adults to prevent tripping, etc. Some of the requirements have also seemed frivolous like placing and removing our own program trash containers in and out of the school restrooms each afternoon because licensing requires "covered" trash containers.

We realize some of the regulations are appropriate for younger children, such as programs serving infants & toddlers; however, some of them are not realistic for school age students. For example: placing outlet covers in every electrical outlet in each program room every afternoon is tedious and doesn't seem necessary or age appropriate for programs serving school age students.

I feel that if schools are safe during the school day for the same students that attend the after school program, then a burden should not be placed on our programs to make changes that licensing requires with out-dated regulations, that were originally designed for preschools before after school programs became more of a fixture in our state. These are the same school rooms and same students. What changes at 3:00 p.m.?

Another role I serve is as a long time board member on the Connecticut After School Network Board of Governors. The network is a statewide alliance representing parents and providers across the state. The Network's goal is to have high quality, affordable after school programs available to every Connecticut child and youth so that they grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected and employable. The Connecticut After School Network provides educational opportunities and support to over 1200 members, who are after school providers throughout Connecticut. I am also the facilitator of the Northwest CT Regional After School Network. Through these roles I have encountered many program providers that have had concerns with the licensing regulations as they pertain to the physical plant in school buildings. Many good programs have not been able to work out reasonable solutions to meet the regulations. It places undue burden on programs that barely make it financially to begin with. Programs have been forced to have towns or school districts sign off on their paperwork so they can become exempt or even worse close all together, leaving students and families stranded with no other safe options after school.

In my various professional roles and as a parent of school age children, I have personally experienced the positive outcomes after school programs can have on children and youth. I have seen firsthand, what the research shows; how after school programs can enhance the overall well-being of our children (emotionally, socially, physically, and academically). Quality after school programs support working families, keep kids safe, and provide extra time for learning. They provide support to schools, communities and especially to our families in Connecticut. I'd hate to see program resources spent on unnecessary licensing requirements instead of focusing on what is really important: program QUALITY.

On behalf of EDUCATION CONNECTION and the Northwest CT Regional After School Network I wholeheartedly support these efforts to exempt school age programs located in public schools from the physical plant requirements of DPH licensing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this much needed and very overdue change.

Respectfully submitted by,

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