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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Response to the Governor's Budget Recommendations
The Department of Education
Submitted by Sherry Linton-Massiah
Connecticut Association for Human Services
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The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) would like to thank Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to offer commentary on the Governor's Budget for the Department of Education. CAHS is an organization committed to advancing steps to end poverty in Connecticut and recognizes the important role of education as a vehicle toward increased opportunities.

First and foremost, CAHS applauds the Governor for his ongoing commitment to early care and education, and articulated recognition that funds directed at early care and education is an investment with high returns in human capital. We are in strong support of the Governor's FY12-13 budget recommendations for the maintenance and increase in funding to early care and education. Funds committed to ensuring parity of the reimbursement rates of State-Funded Centers with that of School Readiness programs, with the potential for increased reimbursement rates to infant and toddlers in State-Funded Centers, are welcomed by early care providers. This increase in reimbursement rates represents a step in the right direction to address rates that have been well below that of the cost to provide care.

CAHS also supports the Governors recommendation for continued public and private partnerships between the state and philanthropists committed to developing the capacity of Connecticut's communities. The joint investment of the state and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund will enable the development and implementation of community plans for increased resources to children and families. Likewise, CAHS supports the Governor's recommendation to hold other early and education programs harmless to the FY11 funding amounts, including Family Resource Centers, State Head Start, Head Start Enhancement, and Early Literacy initiatives.

CAHS does have concerns about a reduction in funding to the DSS-funded Care4Kids Program, which we will address in the March 4 public hearing addressing the Governor's budget as it impacts DSS.

Finally, CAHS, in collaboration with other statewide organization, advocates for a more streamlined, consolidated, coordinated and efficient delivery system for early care and education in Connecticut. As such, the Governor's proposal to shift the DSS State Funded Child Development Centers from the oversight of the DSS to the State Department of Education (SDE) seemingly reflects an acknowledgement of the need for a more streamlined system in early care and education. CAHS supports this recommendation with the following cautions:

- With the assumption that School Readiness is generally recognized as the state's primary preschool program, it is imperative that this shift of DSS State Funded Centers to SDE does not result in a loss of the uniqueness of each program in their criteria for eligibility. Those unique criteria serve to maximize the access of child care for the purpose of school readiness and work support.
- With the recommended consolidation, the state must preserve the following characteristics of the State Funded Centers, which are not present in School Readiness, *1.) State Funded Centers serve low- and moderate-income families statewide, with less focus on the district designation of priority or competitive, as in the case of School Readiness, 2.) State Funded Centers serve infants and toddlers—a vital service of the highest need and cost to families; 3.) State Funded Centers provide services to school-aged children; 4.) State Funded Centers are required to implement a nutritional component—for as we know, hungry children are less likely to demonstrate readiness to learn, and 5.) State Funded Centers require families to be working.*
- These distinctive elements of the State Funded Centers must not be forgotten as these steps to streamline services take place. The process of streamlining services to children and families, while necessary, must be deliberate and intentional and not result in unfavorable unintended consequences.

It is our belief that while the shift of State Funded Centers from DSS to SDE reflects a step in the right direction of streamlining the delivery of early care and education, to most effectively execute a system of programs and services for the education and development of Connecticut's children, a stand-alone Department of Early Education and Development is needed. The breadth and precision necessary to execute the kindergarten through high school system, for which SDE is currently responsible, is vast. To ensure that the early years, which are the most vulnerable and filled with the greatest opportunities for learning, receive the necessary supportive system of services, CAHS recommends the goal of a Department committed to that system of early care and education delivery.

As Connecticut continues on the trajectory toward the creation of a consolidated, streamlined, coordinated system of early care and education, it is necessary to be intentional in every step, knowing that the end goal will take on optimum form through an inclusive process with invitation of diverse community voices to the table to plan and implement.

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