

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Patrice Peterson, President, SEIU Local 2001  
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My name is Patrice Peterson and I'm pleased to present to you SB 1106, the Establishment of the Department of Early Education and Child Development Act. As a state employee of the Department of Developmental Services, I have been deeply committed to the early care and education industry for more than 30 years, working with birth to three programs to optimize the development of children at risk for developmental delays.

The legislation before this Committee addresses two important goals: creating the Department of Early Education and Child Development that will be responsible for all state early childhood education and child care programs and services, and giving a voice to family child care providers that participate in the state-funded care assistance program through collective bargaining.

**Creating a Department of Early Education and Child Development**

It is time to give the early care and education industry a bigger role in the development of our children. The findings of research studies have been consistent for a long time: programs and services of high quality targeted to children in their earliest stages of life are significant counters to a number of risk factors, like, for example, poverty and neglect, which affect many of our children in Connecticut. Yet, the provision of this wide array of services has to be systemic to be an efficient and effective investment in the long run.

At present, there are at least three state agencies in Connecticut that manage state-funded early care and education and unfortunately there is minimal coordination between them. Thus, providers have to deal with multiple funding streams, child outcomes are hard to measure due to inconsistent data collection, and families cannot learn about all the early care and education resources available to them. Even though the statistics are not exact in regards to underserved children in our state, "as of the 2008-2009 school year, almost 21% of kindergarteners arrived at school with no preschool experience." Moreover, "in the state's poorest districts, almost 38% of kindergarteners had no preschool experience." (*CT Voices for Children, Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010*)

We need one comprehensive and coordinated system of early care and education to make sure that all children in Connecticut have the same opportunities to develop their potential and succeed in school and life, and I genuinely believe that the Department of Early Education and Child Development is what will get us there. Connecticut would not be alone in this initiative. Other states, like Washington and Massachusetts, for example, have followed this same logic. The success of our children and their families, as well as of our whole economy, depends upon

consolidating the myriad of early care and education services in one single entity, so that their provision can be streamlined efficiently and effectively.

### **Collective bargaining for Family Child Care providers**

Every day in Connecticut, more than 4,000 family child care providers are busy caring for thousands of young children, preparing them for success in school and in life and enabling their parents to work. These small business people are a vital part of the infrastructure that keeps Connecticut parents in the workforce. And they support our children's social and emotional development and academic success, shrinking children's achievement gaps in their earliest years, and preparing them to be good students and productive citizens.

Working families in Connecticut need child care services of the highest quality. Nearly 160,000 Connecticut children under six spend time in child care settings while their parents are working. For many families, home-based child care – often referred to as family child care – is the ideal setting for their children: these small, nurturing facilities offer flexible, affordable care. Indeed, about half of the children served by Care4Kids, the State's child care subsidy program, are in home-based settings.

Family child care providers in Connecticut are essential to the success of the subsidy program, yet have no voice in ensuring the provision of quality care through the program. They care deeply about their profession and the families they serve, and want to make child care work better for everyone—but they have no way to work together with the state to raise standards. In fact, the child care system in Connecticut is plagued by low wages, high turnover, uneven quality, and inefficiency. The crisis is particularly serious for family providers, and acute for those who serve children through Care4Kids. Care4Kids rates are stuck at 2002 levels; in addition, payments are irregular and training opportunities difficult to access.

Experienced family child care providers know firsthand what it takes to deliver reliable, affordable, quality child care, and want to work together with the state to make the improvements that Connecticut families, communities and businesses need. But the decisions that could improve Connecticut's child care system are made by state agency officials without input from the Connecticut citizens who deliver these services every day.

This bill deals with the child care crisis in Connecticut by extending representational rights to family child care providers in order to ensure that they are able to provide vitally necessary, high-quality care to our children in the state. SB 1106 would extend limited collective bargaining rights to family child care providers who participate in the Care4Kids program.

Giving family child care providers an organized voice enables them to work with the state and other major stakeholders to develop the most appropriate and effective approaches to quality improvement in family child care, and empowers them to help make the changes our state needs. With a voice in the decisions that affect them, providers can improve child care for children and families, find efficiencies in the child care subsidy program, strengthen Connecticut's economy, and make child care a career which can attract and retain a consistent, committed and qualified workforce.

In enacting this legislation, Connecticut will join the 14 states that have already granted representational rights to providers. In some of these states, a voice for family child care providers have resulted in better reimbursement rates, expanded eligibility, highly attended training programs, and financial incentives linked to quality to drive improvements.

Let me finish by clarifying the reach of the Act stating that the parents will continue having the right to choose providers for their children; that providers remain small business owners, and are not state employees for any purposes beyond those set forth the Act; and that family child care providers that participate in the state-funded child care assistance program will not gain the right to strike.

Enabling family child care providers to have a voice will positively affect the lives of our children and their families, our economy and our future.