

**Testimony Supporting S.B. 1106:  
An Act Concerning the Establishment of a  
Department of Early Education and Child Development**  
Annemarie Hillman, Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D., and Jamey Bell, J.D.  
Education Committee  
March 7, 2011

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

**Connecticut Voices for Children *strongly supports* S.B. 1106, which would create a Department of Early Education and Child Development. We also propose an amendment to the bill which would require the selection of a Commissioner for the newly created Department in 2012.**

**Development of a comprehensive, coordinated ECE system is an investment in our future that cannot be delayed.** Research remains clear: high quality early care and education can be powerful counters to risk factors – such as poverty, abuse or neglect, and limited parental education, among others – that affect many of the state's children.<sup>1</sup> Children who experience high quality early care perform better in school, are more likely to graduate, and have less need for remedial education. They are less likely to smoke, use drugs, and abuse alcohol as teens and adults. They earn more money as adults. Quality early care and education benefit the children who experience them, and in turn, improved outcomes for these children benefit society as a whole. For every dollar spent on high quality early childhood programs for at-risk children, it is estimated that there can be up to a \$17 return to society.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in the state's poorest districts, over 32% of kindergarteners had no preschool experience.<sup>3</sup> **Connecticut's children – its future – need quality early care and education programming *now*.**

**Investment in early care and education provides a multitude of benefits to our children, working families, and state.** Childcare remains expensive for working families, with the average cost of center care reaching above \$10,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> State-subsidized child care and education allows parents to keep working, while assuring them that their children are receiving safe and beneficial care. It supports the child care industry, a significant source of jobs in the Connecticut economy.<sup>5</sup> And, most importantly, investment in early care and education promotes the growth, development, and success of children, who will form the next generation of Connecticut workers.

Currently, Connecticut's publicly funded ECE programs and related services fall under the authority of a wide range of state agencies. There is minimal coordination between agencies and programs,

and as a result, providers struggle to sort out multiple funding streams, families have difficulty identifying all of their available ECE options, and inconsistent data collection makes it difficult to track children's engagement and success with the ECE community. National research supports this observation as well – fragmented and siloed ECE delivery systems “limit effectiveness in delivering a seamless continuum of services to children and families, who may frequently utilize services across these siloed systems, experiencing cumbersome and duplicative processes, varied eligibility and enrollment requirements, and undue inconvenience.”<sup>6</sup> The need for a comprehensive, coordinated ECE system, which ensures all children have access to vital, high quality ECE services, is readily apparent. **Given the importance of high quality early care and education to the success of our children, our working families, and our economy, it is crucial that high quality ECE services are provided in an effective, efficient manner.**

We believe that the ideal ECE system incorporates several specific characteristics, which we have identified through high-quality research and input from Connecticut's ECE community. **This system should include each of the eight fundamental elements listed below:**<sup>7</sup>

1. Uniform reporting requirements for providers;
2. Blended and braided state and federal funding sources to allow early care and education providers to access a single funding stream;
3. *Fully* funded services for children aged 0-8 based on evidence and research as to the real cost of high quality care;
4. A quality rating and improvement system;
5. Means to develop our early childhood workforce and improve this workforce's compensation;
6. Coordinated data collection that ensures that data is complete and transparent;
7. Uniform standards for early learning that are developmentally appropriate; and
8. Improved outreach to and access for parents.

**The BUILD Initiative, a national research-based think tank and consulting organization that studies and helps to develop state- and federal-level early care and education systems, has also suggested several features of successful early care and education systems.** They note that:

1. A comprehensive early childhood system includes early learning, health, mental health, nutrition, family support, and early intervention;<sup>8</sup>
2. Early childhood governance structures that control federal and state funds and how they are spent are more successful than those structures that do not have this control;<sup>9</sup>
3. Data are crucial to the effectiveness, transparency, and successful outcomes of an early childhood system.<sup>10</sup>
4. Public-private partnership and local-level system building efforts are beneficial to system stability.<sup>11</sup>
5. *Most importantly*, legislation to develop a comprehensive, coordinated governance system is the best way to form such a system.<sup>12</sup>

**Accordingly, we strongly support S.B. 1106, which would create a Department of Early Education and Child Development. We further suggest that the bill be amended to require the selection of a Commissioner for the Department in 2012. Federal funds which have**

**already been distributed to the State Advisory Council for the purpose of creating a more coordinated early care and education system could be used as funding for this hire.**

S.B. 1106 includes many, if not all, of the fundamental elements of an early care and education system, and we believe it would be a tremendous step toward developing a truly efficient, effective, and comprehensive early care and education system. By coordinating funding, data collection, program monitoring, and outreach in a single Department of Early Education and Child Development, Connecticut would help ensure that all available resources for early care and education are maximized and optimal outcomes are ensured for the children, families, and providers involved with the early care and education community. Furthermore, there would be an economic benefit to Connecticut, as consolidation and improved utilization of resources, including public-private partnerships, would allow Connecticut to serve its working families more cost-effectively.

**The idea of integrating early childhood services within a single department focused solely on those issues is not untested.** In 2005, Massachusetts successfully formed its own “Department of Early Education and Care” by consolidating early care and education services that had existed under their Office of Health and Human Services and their Department of Education.<sup>13</sup> In the past, Massachusetts, too, had experienced diverse, overlapping funding streams and services, as well as conflicting regulations for providers and families. Now, budgeting authority for ECE programs is vested solely within the Department of Early Education and Care, and the Department focuses on improving five key areas – quality, workforce, family support, access and affordability, communications, and infrastructure.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, Massachusetts has been able to build strong infrastructure, promote consistency across programs, modernize technology, integrate wait lists for programs, review its expectations and regulations for providers, expand access to child care, and promote public awareness of the importance of high-quality, fully-funded early care and education.<sup>15</sup> The creation of the Department of Early Education and Care has been quite beneficial to the coordination of Massachusetts’ early childhood services, which in turn, has promoted the success of children and working families.

**In summary, the development of an integrated, efficient early care and education system is vital to both the short- and long-term success of Connecticut’s children, families, and economy. S.B. 1106 proposes the component essential to the formation of such a system: the creation of a Department of Early Education and Care. Consequently, Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports the passage of S.B. 1106.**

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<sup>1</sup> See RAND Labor and Population Research Brief, “Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions” (2005) (available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/2005/RAND\\_RB9145.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/2005/RAND_RB9145.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> See RAND Labor and Population Research Brief, “Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions” (2005) on pg. 3 (available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/2005/RAND\\_RB9145.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/2005/RAND_RB9145.pdf)). Other reports have estimated the per dollar return from investment in early care and education to be even higher. See “A Children’s Stock Portfolio: One Smart Investment, *Connecticut Commission on Children* (April 2007) on pg. 10 (available at

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[http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/prevention/040207\\_stockportfolio\\_v1.pdf](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/prevention/040207_stockportfolio_v1.pdf)), suggesting that “for every dollar invested in high quality preschool in Connecticut, the return on investment is approximately \$18.89 in life-long gains.”

<sup>3</sup> This figure refers to the percent of kindergarteners with no preschool experience in school year 2009-2010. See Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” *Connecticut Voices for Children* (February 2011) on pg. 36 under “DRG I” in Appendix A, Table 13 (available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf>). Note that the Connecticut State Department of Education categorizes school districts into “District Reference Groups” (DRGs). Districts are grouped together on the basis of median family income, parental education, parental occupation, percentage of children receiving free or reduced-price meals, percentage of children whose families speak a language other than English at home, and the number of students enrolled within the district. Districts are classified into DRGs A through I, where districts in DRG “A” contain students generally living in families with the highest socioeconomic status indicators, while districts in DRG “I” contain students living in families with generally the lowest socioeconomic status indicators. Prior to 2005, school districts were grouped slightly differently, though still along the same principles, and the groupings were designated “ERGs” (Education Reference Groups) rather than “DRGs.” *For further information on how the report accounts for the shift from ERGs to DRGs, see* endnote 211 in the report.

<sup>4</sup> See Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” *Connecticut Voices for Children* (February 2011) on pg. 6 (available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf>).

<sup>5</sup> In a study published in 2004, it was noted that Connecticut’s early care and education industry “is a significant driver of the state’s economy,” providing more employment than Connecticut’s pharmaceutical industry. The study further estimated that the “total employment impact” of Connecticut’s child care industry is more than 29,000 jobs. See Stan McMullen and Kathryn Parr, “The Economic Impact and Profile of Connecticut’s ECE Industry,” *CCEA University of Connecticut* (September 2004) on pg. ii (available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece04econimpactfull10.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *BUILD* (November 2010) on pg. 11.

<sup>7</sup> These eight fundamental elements were determined through collaborative research and discussion between Connecticut Voices for Children, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) and form the basis for the 2010 “I Care About Kids and I Vote” campaign led by the aforementioned organizations. *For more information, see* Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” *Connecticut Voices for Children* (February 2011) on pg. 28-30 (available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf>). See also, “It’s About the Children! High Quality Early Education for All Children,” *Connecticut Voices for Children, the CT Early Childhood Alliance, CT Parent Power, and CAHS* (Summer/Fall 2010). See also “It’s About the Children! Ensuring Connecticut’s Kids Are Healthy, Safe and Ready to Learn,” *Connecticut Voices for Children, the CT Early Childhood Alliance, CT Parent Power, and CAHS* (Summer/Fall 2010) (available at <http://icareaboutkids.com/pdf/aboutchildren.pdf>). *For more information about the “I Care About Kids and I Vote” Campaign, see* <http://icareaboutkids.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *The BUILD Initiative* (November 2010) on pg. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> See “Early Childhood Governance: Six State Chart,” *The Build Initiative* (November 2010) on pg. 1. See also “A Look at Early Childhood Governance Structure for Early Childhood in Six States for Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and Connecticut Voices for Children,” *The BUILD Initiative* (November 23, 2010) on pg. 7.

<sup>14</sup> See also “A Look at Early Childhood Governance Structure for Early Childhood in Six States for Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and Connecticut Voices for Children,” *The BUILD Initiative* (November 23, 2010) on pg. 10 and 14.

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<sup>15</sup> See "A Case Study of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care," *Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy and Strategies for Children* (April 2008) on pg. 28-29 (available at [http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/Publications/0804\\_Rennie\\_Case.pdf](http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/Publications/0804_Rennie_Case.pdf)).

**Testimony Supporting Changes to the Truancy Statutes as Proposed in H.B. 6499:  
An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes**  
Annemarie Hillman and Alexandra Dufresne, J.D.  
Education Committee  
March 7, 2011

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

**Connecticut Voices for Children *strongly supports* changes to the truancy statutes as proposed in H.B. 6499.**

Truancy<sup>1</sup> is a significant risk factor for dropout, delinquent behavior, and school failure.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that attendance rates in ninth grade are the best predictor of whether a high school freshman will graduate on-time from high school.<sup>3</sup> In Connecticut, police officers have noted the significant link between reducing truancy and preventing juvenile delinquency.<sup>4</sup> Truancy is also a risk factor for adult criminal justice involvement and incarceration.<sup>5</sup> Given the serious consequences of truancy, it is clearly an issue to be monitored and addressed.

We can infer from school attendance data that truancy is a significant problem in Connecticut.<sup>6</sup> A recent study by the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance found that nearly one-fifth of students in selected districts were absent for more than 10% of the school year.<sup>7</sup> Those students who were absent for more than 10% of the school year, on average, missed almost a month of school each year.<sup>8</sup> Even the "typical attendance" student in consortium districts missed more than two weeks of school, with the average high school student absent for 17 school days per school year.<sup>9</sup>

Extensive research indicates that unmet educational and mental health needs are significant causes of truancy.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, it is critically important for truant students to access support services as soon as possible. The passage of a few weeks before a truant student receives services – what might seem to an adult like a reasonable delay – can make all the difference to a teen who is struggling academically, socially, and emotionally.

H.B. 6499 would help reduce truancy and improve academic success by requiring schools to file a FWSN within thirty (30) calendar days after the failure of a parent or guardian to cooperate with the school's attempts to solve the truancy problems. Connecticut law already requires schools to file FWSNs to report failure of parents or guardians to cooperate with their efforts to reduce a student's truant behavior.<sup>11</sup> This amendment to the law would simply help ensure that students access CSSD and/or other agency support services in a timely manner. Although this time limitation would