



Degrees Without Boundaries

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Testimony by

Amy Watson

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Amy Watson. I am the coordinator of the Early Childhood Alternate Route to Certification at Charter Oak State College. I am here today to speak to the importance of **Raised Bill 927, An Act Concerning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators and Raised Bill 928, An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation.**

Charter Oak State College wants to thank you for bringing attention to the important issue of quality Early Childhood Education for Connecticut's young children. We applaud Governor Dannel Malloy's focus on early childhood and his plans to expand preschool opportunities to all children. Under the Governor's leadership, Stamford became the first city in Connecticut to offer universal access to pre-school. Therefore, we know that he understands the importance of high quality early childhood experiences for all children.

To Raised Bill 927, Charter Oak State College is in support of the proposed 50/50 legislation which is necessary to ensure that the workforce will be able to meet training and professional development guidelines for those working in School Readiness programs. We believe that to advance the educational level of all children in Connecticut, it is important to have an educated workforce and multiple paths for teachers to complete or advance their education - such as credentials in early childhood education, degrees in early childhood education and alternate routes to early childhood certification. Charter Oak does not have a traditional teacher certification program; however, we offer a concentration in child studies that allows ease of transfer for students at Connecticut Community Colleges that are earning an associate's degree in early childhood. Most of these students are already working in the early childhood education field and the bachelor's degree allows them to hold positions as lead teachers in early childhood programs, complete master's level teacher certification programs, or master's degrees in other related fields.

The current Statute is unachievable. As of 2015, one teacher in state-funded classroom will be required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in early childhood, child development, or related field. Rather than let experienced and committed teachers lose their jobs or choose to leave the field because they cannot meet this deadline, we support the new proposed language which will phase in the requirement until 2020. Currently, only 41% of the teachers in state-funded programs hold bachelor's degrees and 25% of the teachers in these programs hold associate degrees. The increase to the bachelor's degree level represents an unrealistic increase in too short a time period. Currently, early childhood teachers in state-funded programs are required to have a minimum of a CDA (not a college degree) and 12 college credits (four courses).

We are closely monitoring the Raised Bill 927 (50/50 legislation) to determine how Charter Oak can best meet the needs of the adults who need to earn bachelor's degrees to stay in early childhood. Charter Oak has had 100 students graduate with concentrations in Child Studies in the last five years. This does not include students who complete an individualized studies concentration who combine early childhood coursework with other academic areas. Currently we have 60 students enrolled in our Child Studies concentration. 58% of Child Studies students receive financial aid; this is almost twice as many as other Charter Oak students receiving financial aid in other academic areas (33%). In addition to Child Studies graduates, the college has served the needs of early childhood professionals in Connecticut through a range of supportive programs. In 2010, 121 professionals were able to gain credit through our Pathways exams, a total of 143 received scholarships (some of these students are only taking individual courses), 46 directors were awarded the Connecticut Directors Credential, and 94 professionals took courses at Charter Oak to get their credentials.

The majority of early childhood teachers are full-time professionals and adult learners making very low wages and are a population with many challenges to gaining college credit and degree completion. Even with this modification to the statute, many teachers will find it difficult to fund college coursework and complete full-time coursework. Connecticut must commit to providing financial support to our early childhood workforce to enable them to complete these requirements. Connecticut must provide innovative strategies for earning credit and degree completion to prevent the impact of losing experienced professionals from the field of early childhood. With Charter Oak's ability to move quickly and effectively and its long history of collaboration, we know that we can be part of the solution to meeting the educational needs of the early childhood workforce.

To Raised Bill 928, Charter Oak State College supports programs around the Alternate Route to Early Childhood Certification.

The Early Childhood Alternate Route to Certification 112 endorsement at Charter Oak State College was created in collaboration with six other colleges to address the needs of teacher preparation in birth through kindergarten in Connecticut in response to an RFP in 2007 from DHE and SDE to develop alternate pathways in early childhood

(See statute 10-145b). The collaborating partners chose Charter Oak to administer the program because of its demonstrated commitment to early childhood education, its ability to meet the needs of adult students, its success in delivering programs in innovative ways, and because of its history of collaboration with other agencies and institutions of higher education.

The program was fully accredited in the fall of 2010 by the Joint Boards of the State Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education. The program was commended for its effective use and participation of the advisory board; its rigorous content and evaluation; and the commitment and expertise of the faculty. The program has collected extensive data on student performance and program outcomes.

The program has graduated three cohorts of students for a total of 31 graduates. The fourth cohort is currently in progress. 71% of graduates now hold certified positions in early childhood magnet schools, preschool special education classrooms, or birth to three early intervention programs. 85% of graduates have experienced an improvement in their employment status as a result of completing the program. 100% of graduates are still in the field of early childhood. These results are consistent with employment rates for other teacher preparation programs- both traditional and alternate routes. Graduate and employer surveys have been overwhelmingly positive with 100% of graduates and current employers indicating satisfaction with the preparation provided by the program. 100% of cooperating teachers working with our student interns have indicated they would recommend our candidates for positions in early childhood or hire them if they had the chance.

Our experience and data have clearly demonstrated that the Alternate Route is a successful alternative to the standard early childhood teacher certification program. The Alternate Routes are significant pathways to certification for many new and cross-endorsed Teachers in Connecticut and are an important contribution to the teaching workforce.

We support the proposed regulations (SDE) and should the new regulations be passed we know Charter Oak State College can be a resource and provide information and assistance related to the development or modification of ARC programs for early childhood. We are looking forward to continuing to work to develop alternate pathways for teachers to obtain credentials in early childhood.

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