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*Select Committee on Children*

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*House Bill No. 5293 An Act Extending the "Care 4 Kids" Program to Families with a Parent Who is Actively Seeking Employment.*

*February 7, 2011*

On behalf of the YWCAs of Connecticut I am submitting this testimony in regards to *H.B. No. 5293 An Act Extending the "Care 4 Kids" Program to Families with a Parent Actively Seeking Employment*. The YWCA is a national organization dedicated to eliminating racism and empowering women while promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Collectively the YWCAs in Connecticut have adopted a policy platform which includes women's economic empowerment, child care and youth development and racial justice to name a few. Together we serve 76,823 people, families and children.

At the YWCA Hartford Region, we believe that every woman, every girl and every child deserves the opportunity to shine at each stage of life. Since 1867, we have been committed to this vision and our mission to empower women and girls and eliminate racism.

Committed to creating opportunities one woman at a time, YWCA serves Greater Hartford with vital programs, including early learning and school-age childcare; emergency, transitional and permanent supportive housing; child abuse prevention; youth leadership development; racial justice awareness; and financial literacy education. Serving 2,300 people annually, we are a recognized advocate on issues related to safety for women and their families, economic empowerment, racial justice, youth development and affordable childcare.

Our colleagues in New Britain, serve almost 300 children daily from infant/toddlers through 5<sup>th</sup> grade before and after school programs, over 90% of whom receive Care 4 Kids; while also providing sexual assault crisis response services and preventive education to 43 towns in the state, after-school programs for middle school girls, family literacy education, certified nurse assistant training. Recognizing that access to affordable childcare is key to ending the cycle of poverty in our communities, YWCA New Britain, is committed to continuing to advocate for assistance to low-wage working families, as well as those actively seeking employment.

It is with this mission, and the people that we serve in mind, that I request your consideration of this proposed legislation.

House Bill No. 5293 adds the provision that families who have at least one parent or caregiver "actively seeking employment" have access to the Care 4 Kids (C4K) Program. Already families where parent(s) or caregiver(s) are all employed, attending high school, or receiving cash assistance under temporary family assistance while undergoing education training or other job preparation activity have access to this vital program.

Early childhood development provides a basis for community and economic development. Skilled and competent children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable state economy. C4K childcare services help state residents get and keep the jobs they need in order to provide for their families; to contribute to the state's tax base; and to participate as consumers who can help turn the state's economy around.

Currently, about 75% of the children attending YWCA early learning programs in low-income areas receive assistance through C4K. These centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and provide a curriculum that promotes social/emotional, cognitive and physical development.

Scientific studies have shown early positive childcare is connected with future academic opportunities and success. This is in large part due to the way neuropathways are established during infancy and as the child matures. In a very real sense, children deprived of early stimulation are set at a significant disadvantage even before they step foot inside a kindergarten classroom, thereby reinforcing the significant achievement gap that exists in Connecticut schools. It is well established that providing consistent, quality child care is enormously important. This consistency is made possible for many low-income families through C4K.

Recently we had a child in our care from a two parent family. The father walked out on the family and the mother could no longer afford childcare in our program. In this instance C4K was very responsive and very quickly confirmed her eligibility for the program. She was able to keep her job and her child had no interruption in his care or learning. This is what C4K was meant to do.

However, in the current economic climate, many parents or caregivers who lose their jobs are afforded with only a limited selection of employment opportunities. Children with a parent or caregiver of any socio-economic background who are unemployed and looking for work should not be penalized simply for living during a time of economic turmoil.

Women and minorities in particular are at risk in these situations. They are often the first to lose their jobs or take longer to be hired once the economy begins to recover. As such, we encourage you to pass 5293 so that families, already on C4Ks could search for employment without losing this benefit. Many families in search of employment cite lack of child care (or access to affordable, quality child care) as a reason they cannot find employment. These families do not have a safe place to care for their children while they look for work and when they find a job, they then need to find childcare before they can begin to work.

The way the C4K regulations are written, a person must notify C4K within 10 days upon any change in employment status, family status or income. If the parent or another caregiver in the home is no longer employed, they lose their benefits.

While HB 5293 may be an answer, it also will require some clarification. For example there are many questions that must be considered such as: what is the definition of "actively seeking employment;" how long would the parent/caregiver be given before they would lose their C4K benefit; what type of proof would be required; and, what would the number of hours be covered by C4K, to name a few.

Recognizing that these are challenging economic times and that HB No. 5293 is a work in progress, we respectfully offer our expertise as a provider for C4K and an agency that works with the families that this legislation would impact, to identify these questions and collectively find solutions. Thank you and we look forward to working with you as together we grow Connecticut's workforce.

