

Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Re: Governor's Budget Proposal – DSS
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Friday, February 17, 2012

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (Alliance) would like to thank Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to testify on the Governor's Budget for the Department of Social Services. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth to age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

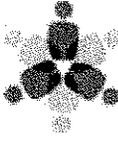
There are positive aspects to the Governor's DSS budget plan and areas of concern. On the positive side, the Alliance supports the \$6.8 million increase to Care4Kids, the state's child care voucher program for working parents. The Governor's proposal is a slight adjustment of \$136,000 over the originally appropriated FY2013 amount.

The Alliance would like to see these additional dollars as a down payment for a longer-term plan to increase rates to providers. Connecticut is one of three states that have not increased provider rates since 2001. The federal government recommends that states set rates at the 75th percentile of current market rates. Connecticut sets its Care4Kids rate at the 60th percentile of 2001 market rates. Raising rates to current market rates – either at the 60th or 75th percentile – is quite costly and we acknowledge existing budget constraints. However, not raising rates comes at a cost to children and families.

Why? Increased rates allow families to access higher quality early care for their children. Increased rates enable providers to increase staff wages, which helps them in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. For family day care providers, increased rates are a matter of economic stability.

The Governor's budget preserves funding for two Children's Trust Fund programs: Nurturing Families Network, which provides intensive home-visiting for first-time, high-risk parents, and Help Me Grow, which connects children to resources who are identified at risk for developmental and behavioral problems. We are concerned, however, with the \$2.3 cut to the Children's Trust Fund, which eliminates funding for Family Empowerment, Family School Connection, Children's Law Center, and general fund support for the Kinship Fund. We urge the Committee to restore funding for these programs.

The Governor's plan also transfers the Charts-A-Course program from DSS to SDE. This shift follows moving the DSS State-Funded Child Care Centers to SDE in the 2011 legislative session. These shifts are part of an effort to align early childhood programs as part of a



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comprehensive and coordinated system. We believe that we are most likely to achieve a functioning early care and education system if all of the elements of such a system are designed and/or reformed pursuant to a coordinated plan, rather than developed piecemeal. We continue to support P.A. 11-181 and reiterate our hope that the planning director whom it calls for (a position half-funded by philanthropy) will be hired quickly.

The budget proposal cuts HUSKY B from \$42.6 million to \$20.9 million. It is unclear whether this decrease will impact or change coverage for the 15,000 children enrolled in HUSKY B. This is an area of concern. Also affecting HUSKY is a 10% reduction in the 2-1-1/United Way HUSKY Infoline, which provides provide low-income eligible families with program information and help getting coverage. The Alliance urges the Committee to examine these cuts and ensure that children and families are held harmless.

The budget plan cuts by \$692,000 the State-Funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, which provides food assistance to legal immigrants who have not been in the country for more than five years. This program provides critically needed nutrition assistance to low-income people, many who have young children. Research demonstrates a direct link between lack of food and good nutrition to the ability of children to learn.

The Alliance is concerned about the significant cuts to the Department of Children and Families. A large portion of the cuts comes as cost-savings (\$23.8 million) by shifting children out of congregate care and more to family and foster care. This is a major initiative of DCF to ensure that children are in the least restrictive and family-based setting with community-based wrap-around services. The cost-savings from this shift were intended to be re-invested in community supports, many of which of currently non-existent. Without in investment in community supports, there is great concern that there will be poorer outcomes for children.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit testimony.