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Appropriations Committee
Testimony of the Connecticut Association for Human Services
RE: Governor's Proposed Budget—State Department of Education and
Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Submitted by Liz Dupont-Diehl, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good afternoon, Senator Harp and Representative Walker and members of the committee. My name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS seeks to end poverty and empower all families to build a secure economic future. We produce regular analyses of child poverty, both within and throughout Connecticut and nationally, and study the "developmental education gap" and workforce-related poverty issues. CAHS is a member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance and also operates a number of programs to help people become self-sufficient.

Today we would like to focus on several areas of the Governor's Budget relating to the state Department of Education and Higher Education:

First, CAHS applauds the Governor for including significant investments in early care and education in this budget plan, and we urge the Appropriations Committee to support his vision.

Specifically, the Governor proposes:

- \$4 million to create 500 new preschool slots in priority school districts
- \$3 million for professional development for early childhood educators
- \$5 million in bonding for facility improvements and capital repairs at licensed early care and education centers

- \$5 million in bonding for design and implementation of a Tiered Quality Improvement Rating System (TQRIS)

The Governor also maintains funding for early childhood programs, including Child Care Services, School Readiness, Family Resource Centers, Parent Trust Fund, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Early Literacy, Head Start and Even Start. We urge the Committee to maintain programs at these funding levels.

The proposal recognizes the dire need for a coordinated, aligned and consolidates early childhood system, birth to age eight, which resulted P.A. 11-181, setting in motion a process to tie the many components of early childhood services together and for hiring a planning director, half-funded by philanthropy, to build such a system.

We applaud the focus on closing the achievement gap between urban and suburban, high and low-income, and race/ethnicities students, and. We would also rather see Charter Schools and other new programs prioritize racial and economic integration.

The experience for students moving from different levels of public schools and out into the workforce is now often disjointed. Fixing our K-12 system and making it part of a continuum, that begins pre-K and extends into the workforce, is critical. In light of this need for a seamless experience for students, we applaud efforts to align Common Core Standards curriculum -- and urge involvement of higher education.

Finally, regarding student financial aid, we urge the Committee to consider the impact of cuts and consolidating on students who are low-income, minority or disadvantaged.

We appreciate the Governor's commitment to maintain basic needs assistance and services to Connecticut's low-income residents. Connecticut's areas of unequal opportunity need to be addressed with the structure needed to create and sustain healthy people and communities. A small amount we spend today helping educate a teenager or low-income adult yields **tremendous** return on investment in just a few short years, and the benefit only compounds with time.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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