

TESTIMONY OF THE
CONNECTICUT COALITION
FOR **JUSTICE**
IN EDUCATION FUNDING
TO THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 5, 2012

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding appreciates this opportunity to submit comments on **Raised Bill No. 300 — An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education**.

This welcome bill would establish universal access to quality preschool programs for children who reside in Priority School Districts by expanding the School Readiness program. Universal access to the program within the Priority Districts, plus those that have been so designated since 2005, would be phased in commencing in FY14 and fully in place by FY18, with grants to be contingent on available funding and a satisfactory annual evaluation. The bill also raises the educational qualifications required for staff employed by early childhood programs receiving state funds, phasing in those higher standards over the next 8 years.

On economic grounds alone, expanding the provision of publicly funded preschool programs is possibly the most compelling educational investment that the Governor and this legislature could make. This conclusion has been drawn repeatedly by both early childhood researchers and education economists, including experts who will be testifying on behalf of plaintiffs in the *CCJEF v. Rell* school finance lawsuit. In study after rigorous study,¹ greater access to and improved quality of preschool has been found to be associated with lower rates of special education, higher achievement, and subsequently higher graduation rates, which in turn generate a plethora of economic and social gains over the lifetime of those graduates — gains that accrue not just to the high school graduate personally but also to local, state, and federal governments in the form of increased tax revenues and decreased expenditures for health, crime, welfare, etc.

CCJEF strongly supports this bill and notes that its praiseworthy contents lay an essential foundation for the state to meet its constitutional obligation to ensure an adequate and equitable education for all children.

¹ The most famous of these rigorous research studies focus on the High Scope/Perry Pre-School program (<http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>), the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/Program.htm>), and the Abecadarian program (<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/>).

It is important also to point out that adequate, predictable, and sustained long-term state funding will be essential. The state must not abdicate its constitutional responsibility for providing this vital component of an adequate education by passing off the costs to school districts and their municipalities. As the economy rebounds, the state will also need to extend universal access to quality preschool throughout every Connecticut community to ensure equal educational opportunity for all.

Respectfully submitted,

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The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) is a broad-based coalition of municipalities, local boards of education, statewide professional education associations, unions, and other pro-education advocacy organizations, parents and schoolchildren aged 18 or older, and other concerned Connecticut taxpayers. Member school communities are home to nearly half of Connecticut's public school students, including some three-fourths of all minority students, those from low-income families, and students from homes where English is not the primary language.