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Education Committee
Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest, Early Care & Education Policy Analyst
Connecticut Association for Human Services
RE: SB 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness
February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the Governor's budget recommendations laid out in Senate Bill 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness. I am Jillian Gilchrest, Early Care and Education Policy Analyst for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS).

Founded in 1910, CAHS promotes family economic security strategies that empower low-income working families to achieve financial independence. CAHS is also a member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership and advocacy organization committed to improving the developmental outcomes for all children, birth to 8, in the areas of early learning, health, safety and economic security.

CAHS applauds the focus in this bill on Grade Level Reading. By ensuring that continuing education include at least 15 hours of training in teaching of reading and reading readiness and assessment of reading performance, including methods of teaching language skills necessary for reading, reading comprehension skills, phonic and the structure of the English language, this bill recognizes the importance of grade level reading for students and their future educational achievement.

The Governor's proposal also highlights the importance of cooperation and coordination with early childhood education providers to ensure alignment with district expectations for student entry into Kindergarten. We believe that this coordination is important for all schools, not just those designated as conditional funding districts. Similarly, we applaud the recognition that full day Kindergarten is important to student success, but believe that this should be a universal recommendation for all Connecticut schools, not solely schools classified as category three.



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This bill also invests in a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Rating System. While we support moving forward quickly on designing and implementing the TQRIS, we emphasize that the TQRIS is only one element of the broader coordinated and comprehensive early care and education system Connecticut is designing under PA 11-181, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Child Development, which passed last session. 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, so that the process can move forward in coordination with the development of the TQRIS.

Finally, CAHS has long been concerned with the “developmental education gap.” CAHS has researched this topic extensively, with reports in 2009 and 2011 and meetings with key stakeholders. Beyond the fact that too many children never graduate or go to college, many students who do are surprised on entering college to learn they need remedial classes that won’t count towards their requirements and which use up finite financial aid.

CAHS proposes to address this with a systematic way to connect public schools to higher education and would like this considered in a comprehensive package on educational competitiveness. The proposal would require each Priority School District to partner with at least one community college, state university or participating private college to:

1. Evaluate and align curriculums and share definitions and competencies expected for college success.
2. Test students and evaluate results, junior year or sooner, to gauge and establish college readiness.



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Communication between higher education and public schools is critical – but has no opportunity to occur in the current structure of each system. Requiring a partnership to discuss curriculum alignment and 11th grade test scores will create an ongoing opportunity and requirement for each system to consider the demands and requirements of the other.

In closing, CAHS is supportive of SB 24 and its efforts to improve the quality education in Connecticut. We are excited to see Education proposals this year that focus on alignment between Pre-K and K-12 as well as K-12 and higher education. These connections, combined with rigorous and ongoing evaluation of data, is key – both on its own merits, and to the success of other school reforms.