



Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Luis Caban, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

Education Committee

Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest, Early Care & Education Policy Analyst Connecticut Association for Human Services

RE: SB 300, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education & HB 5350, An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three March 5, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of SB 300, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and HB 5350, An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three. 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.

An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education creates a phase-in plan for statewide access to School Readiness for all eligible 3 & 4 year olds by the year 2018. In 2011, the state's School Readiness program served 9,513 three and four year olds in priority school districts and 826 three and four year olds in competitive districts. However, at least 25% of Connecticut's preschoolers living in struggling families, earning under 75% of the state median income, remained unserved by any form of state or federal subsidy for early care and education. Even more shocking, over 86% of infants and toddlers in struggling families remained unserved.

The state's funded programs, including School Readiness, state-funded Child Care Centers and state-funded Head Start require high standards for staff training and program accreditation resulting in a quality early childhood experience for children B-5. CAHS supports this committee's commitment to expanding access to quality early care, but we emphasize that universal access to School Readiness 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 expansion of high quality early care for Connecticut's children B-5.

CAHS also supports HB 5350, An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three.

Connecticut has the largest academic achievement gap in the country, and it begins before children enter school. In CAHS' 2010 report, ["Closing the Achievement Gap: Early Reading Success and Connecticut's Economic Future"](#), we argue that a child reading at grade level by 3rd grade is a critical public policy issue. Children need the opportunity to succeed regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender or primary language, and ensuring that children are reading at grade level by 3rd grade is an important step toward closing our state's achievement gap and improving outcomes for children.

We applaud this bill's inclusion of workforce development, parent engagement and curriculum alignment as it pertains to grade level reading. CAHS would like to see this committee include preschool in the proposed curricular alignment and year-end transition planning for students and tracking of student performance data from year-to-year, all of which are currently targeted only at children in kindergarten through grade three.

Research shows that high quality early care programs help close the preparation gap for low-income children, and are a critical part of closing the racial and economic achievement gaps in Connecticut. Furthermore, alignment between preschool and K-3 education helps prevent against "fade-out," helping young children maintain the gains from preschool into later grades.

We laud the inclusion of parental engagement provisions in this bill, as parents are children's first and most important teachers, particularly for the youngest children, and we hope that this committee will consider expanding these provisions to include preschool age children as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of these very important bills.