

**Testimony before the Select Committee on Children Committee
Re: S.B. 273 – An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program
Submitted by Paul Filson, Director SEIU Connecticut State Council
Tuesday, March 6, 2012**



**CONNECTICUT
STATE COUNCIL**

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

Good afternoon, Senator Gerrantana, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. I am Paul Filson Director of the Connecticut State Council of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). SEIU represents over 55,000 members, and is the largest union in Connecticut. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 273

I am pleased to testify in favor of this important bill. For the first time in Connecticut's history, family child care providers who receive Care4Kids money from the state to run their operations will have the opportunity to join a union. In December of 2011 95% of the family child care providers voted to join SEIU. Providers said loud and clear that they wanted a say in addressing problems like high turnover, timely payments, training, and access. It is our intent to negotiate better wages and benefits for these incredibly important and hard working women who take care of so many children and provide a key link in the continuum of education. Family child care providers will be advocating for the right to full collective bargaining during this legislative session.

In particular, SEIU supports, as a first step, increasing Care4Kids rates up to the federal guidelines of 75th percentile of market rates. Raising rates will improve the quality of care and increase choice and access to child care. Connecticut is one of only three states that have not raised child care subsidy rates since 2002. The federal government recommends that states set rates at the 75th percentile of that state's current market rate. Connecticut sets its Care4Kids rate at the 60th percentile of 2001 market rates. The low rates, lack of benefits, and exclusion from decision making have led to 1000 family child care providers leaving the field in the last decade. Getting to the 75th percentile is a good start. Raising rates addresses both quality and access. With increased rates, families will have more choice and access to quality child care, and providers will be better able to attract, pay and retain staff.

According to the Connecticut Department of Labor, child care workers are among the lowest paid workers in the state. It is alarming that we pay workers such a low wage to take on one of the most important jobs – the care for and the preparing of young children for success in school. Raising rates would increase the wages of these early care professionals. SEIU supports the bill provision that allocates the scheduled \$6.8 million increase for FY13 as a first down payment to increase provider rates, expand access, and increase quality.

The other provisions of the bill are important also. Minor teen parents should stay in school and changing regulations to allow for more subsidies for this incredibly at risk population is important. Extending eligibility for up to six months after a parent loses a job and is seeking re-employment makes sense during hard economic times and when finding a job is difficult. Currently, when a parent enrolled in Care4Kids loses a job, the subsidy is maintained for only between four and eight weeks- this is clearly not enough time. Finally, extending the eligibility period to 12 weeks for women currently on Care4Kids who are temporarily absent from work for maternity leave makes sense.

SEIU urges the committee to vote in favor of SB273.

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