



March 6, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Co-Chair
Representative Urban Co-Chair
Members of the Select Committee on Children

Testimony in Support of SB 273- An Act Concerning the Care 4 Kids Program

I am Tiffany Murasso, Director of Early Childhood programs for Catholic Charities. I would like to thank the administration for its support of education and for recognizing the importance of early care and education as a means to help close the achievement gap in our state. I am here today to speak in strong support of SB 273, An Act Concerning the Care 4 Kids program, specifically regarding the Minor Parent Provision which excludes the parent's income when determining eligibility for teen parents and the rates provision, which provides an increased payment rate to Care 4 Kids to bring rates to the 75th percentile by 2022.

Access to affordable childcare is a huge barrier for teen parents, many of whom have not been eligible for Care 4 Kids because their parent's income did not meet eligibility criteria. Many of these young mothers are forced to drop out of school to care for their baby. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls. Only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by the age of 22, verses 90% of women who did not give birth during adolescence. In Connecticut teen birth rates fluctuate tremendously by town. The state average for births to 15 to 17 year olds was 12.8% in 2008. However, that percentage jumped to 47% in Hartford and 44% in New Haven.

Connecticut is one of only three states that have not raised the child care subsidy rates since 2002. Care 4 Kids funding is critical to the operation of School Readiness funded programs. As teacher certification requirements continue to increase, we must be able to increase wages simultaneously. We can not do this unless the reimbursement rates increase as well. We agree with the need for highly educated, qualified teachers, however, we must be able to attract and retain this level of staff. Although we continue to require our teaching staff to further its education, we have not been able to increase salaries since the last COLA in 2008.

We request that consideration be given to keeping these provisions in this bill and supporting any legislation that addresses increasing reimbursement rates for state funded early care and education programs. Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Murasso
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