

Good morning,

My name is Cyomara Fisher, Program Manager of Hartford Action Plan (HAP), HAP mission is in Hartford and throughout Connecticut, to mobilize communities and advocate for adolescent sexual health and safety; and to empower youth and young parents to make healthy decisions about their reproductive health, sexuality and relationships.

I am here to testify in favor of S.B. 273, an act concerning the Care4Kids Program

First, I would like to thank the Committee for raising this bill in acknowledgement of the need to make changes to the Care4Kids subsidy program to allow minor parents attending high school to be eligible for the program, allow women on maternity leave to continue to receive Care4Kids during their leave, extend the eligibility to unemployed recipients seeking employment, and to adjust payment rates for the program.

As we are well aware, education is a vehicle out of poverty and the importance of education in our efforts to reduce poverty cannot be overemphasized. Given the high cost of care and heightened risks to both minor parents and children born to minor parents, it is essential that Care4Kids be available as a source of financial assistance for minor parents to enable them to finish school, bettering their life and the life of their child.

Care4Kids is the state's largest child care subsidy program, serving 21,786 children from low- to moderate-income families who cannot otherwise afford child care. Currently, when a woman who receives Care4Kids takes time off to care for a newborn, she is expected to notify Care4Kids of her change in employment status. Care4Kids then suspends her subsidy until she returns to work.

Additionally, while taking leave from work to care for a newborn, a woman who receives Care4Kids will need to remove her other child from child care, interrupting that child's routine and causing the child care center to scramble to cover the costs of an open slot. If the child care center cannot afford to hold a slot for her child, that child loses the slot and the mother must look for child care elsewhere in order to keep working. Studies have documented that schedules and routines influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Predictable and consistent schedules in preschool classrooms help children feel secure and comfortable.

In regards to unemployment provision, recipient of program benefits whose employment is terminated and is actively seeking a new job shall remain eligible for the child care subsidy program for not more than six months during such period of unemployment. Current Care4Kids allows a parent who is enrolled in the program and the loses their job to remain eligible for between 4-8 weeks. In the current recession, this is an insufficient amount of time to secure new employment. A 6-month window is a more realistic timeline for a parent to find a new job, and thus more economic security.

Removing a child from quality child care just because the parent becomes unemployed disrupts the child's environment and will impede the child's positive development.

Thank you,
Hartford Action Plan