

**TESTIMONY REGARDING RAISED BILL No. 373 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTH AND SAFETY IN CHILD CARE FACILITIES**

Submitted to: The Committee on Public Health

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Good Morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, My name is Tina Pascoe. I am the President of Synergy Healthcare Services and I am here today in support of Raised Bill No.373. I would like to thank the Public Health Committee for raising this important bill in support of annual inspections of licensed child day care centers, group day care homes, and family day care homes.

I am a Registered Nurse and hold a Juris Doctorate with a concentration in Health Care. My 32 years of nursing includes several in pediatrics and twelve (12) years working for the State of CT Department of Public Health where I was a consultant and manager of numerous programs including the Title V Children with Special Health Care Needs and Medical Home Collaborative Project.

During the past six (6) years I have been employed as a Child Care Health Consultant, and I have provided health consultation to four large Head Start Programs and ten (10) child care centers across various areas of the state, including: New Haven, Norwalk, Stamford, Waterbury and Hartford. As a health consultant, I visit centers regularly and assist programs with reducing health and safety hazards, as well as promoting healthy behaviors, such as improved nutrition and increased physical activity to reduce childhood obesity. I also provide centers and families with health trainings and resources to access health, mental health, developmental and dental health services.

Routine unannounced inspections by licensing specialists are an important method of monitoring and promoting a health and safety environment for young children. However, with only bi-annual inspections for child day care centers and every three years inspections for family day care homes, Connecticut ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation in frequency of inspections. The requirement for an annual inspection of all child care programs as stated in this bill is a first step in promoting quality.

However, the lack of written guidelines for licensing specialists presents a significant problem for child care providers who are striving to maintain a healthy and safe program for young children. A large portion of my time is spent working with child care directors on licensing compliance including interpreting licensing specialists' inspection reports, creating plans of correction, and providing trainings and monitoring to ensure future compliance.

Because of inconsistency of expectations and interpretation of child care regulations among licensing specialists, child care directors find the process of inspections and efforts to improve health and safety, ambiguous, frustrating, and challenging. When programs are cited for regulation non-compliance, I create with the child care program a corrective action plan.

However a plan acceptable for one licensing specialist, may not be accepted by another licensing specialist.

While this bill offers an important step, additional resources are required to ensure healthy, safe and inclusive care for all children. About 1 in 10 children have a special health care need, such as asthma, a life threatening allergy, diabetes, and epilepsy, and most require medication administration while in child care. In the Head Start Programs I serve, about 20-30% of the children have a special health care need.

Although Connecticut has strong regulations governing medication administration, the Department of Public Health has not adopted a best practice curriculum as in many other states, such as New York and Colorado, to ensure that all child care providers have superior training. The Crowley and Rosenthal (2009) study of unannounced, routine inspections by licensing specialists, identified serious medication risks in a large percentage of Connecticut child care centers. For example, over 40% of the centers did not have complete written approved orders for medications from a licensed health care prescriber. These findings are consistent with my observations as health consultant.

A high quality medication administration training program for providers is critical to ensure that children receive medications as needed and without any risk of error. *The Connecticut Medication Administration Training for Early Education and Child Care* is such a program. Furthermore, the Crowley and Rosenthal study confirmed that not only a high quality training but access to regular health consultation was linked to better regulatory compliance and healthy and safe programs. Through funding from the Children's Trust Fund and the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, I am working with Dr. Crowley of Yale University School of Nursing to prepare nurses to deliver this training across the state. However, the continuation of this effort is uncertain without additional support from the Department of Public Health.

In summary, implementation of Bill No. 373 and the requirement for annual routine, unannounced inspections of child day care centers, group day care homes and family day care homes is a critical step in strengthening child care quality in Connecticut. Furthermore, development of written guidelines for licensing specialists and child care providers will provide essential guidance to promote compliance with regulations. Adoption of a best practice medication administration training curriculum and system of dissemination as well as health consultation are all vital elements to ensure healthy and safe care.

Children cannot learn unless they are healthy and safe. It is our duty and responsibility to the children of Connecticut and their parents to ensure that all child care programs are of the highest quality. This bill and additional efforts to address these concerns are critical.

Thank you