



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

**Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Re: S.B. 382 – An Act Concerning Teacher Certification
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Tuesday, March 13, 2012**

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth to age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

I am here today to testify in support of *S.B. 382 – An Act Concerning Teacher Certification*. This bill changes the current endorsement to teach elementary education grades from Kindergarten through 6 to Grades 1 through 6. One outcome of this change would be the resulting positive impact that it would have on the early childhood workforce and the gap we, as a state, face to place highly qualified teachers in our publicly funded early childhood classroom.

Several years ago, state regulations changed the elementary endorsement to include kindergarten. This change resulted in compromising the *Integrated Early Childhood /Special Education Nursery through Grade 3 Endorsement (113)*. Students, who may have chosen the stronger and more comprehensive early childhood preparation, instead were counseled to, and subsequently opted to, receive the K-6 elementary degree (013), as this also allows them to teach grades K-3. This change in policy marginalized the early childhood degree programs, and today the amount of students graduating with the Nursery through Grade 3 endorsement are significantly reduced, as well as the existence of these program . We now have too many teachers certified in elementary education and too few certified in early childhood education.

Teachers of young children benefit from a strong knowledge base in child development and developmentally appropriate practice, and this content is best found in specialized early childhood preparation programs. Teachers graduating with this degree are prepared to teach young children, who learn very differently than a child in grades 4-6. It is critical that we put teachers in classrooms with young children who understand fundamental concepts like executive functioning and early language literacy, which will help to ensure that a child is ready to enter kindergarten, and able to read at grade level by grade 3. Preparing teachers K through 6, waters down this specialized knowledge base, as the focus of the content becomes broader and more about curriculum and instruction.

Finally, this bill strengthens the argument for pay parity between pre-k teachers and kindergarten teachers. In Connecticut, the average wage of a kindergarten teacher is about \$60,000; the average wage for a pre-k teacher in a state-funded program is \$31,000. Pay for the early childhood workforce is the elephant in the room. Quality and compensation go hand in hand. If Connecticut is serious about closing the achievement gap, and we know that we need to start in the earliest years, we need to get serious about address pay parity in the early childhood workforce. We need to for the sake of our children.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.