

An Act Creating a Process for Family Child Care Providers

to Collectively Bargain with the State

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
LABOR COMMITTEE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and members of the committee,

My name is Gary Burris, I'm a Senior Policy Associate with the Economic Opportunity Institute in Seattle, Washington. One of my areas of expertise is early childhood care and education and childcare.

My previous work experiences are most relevant to this discussion. Beginning in January 2004, I was the Administrator for Quality Programs in the Washington State Division of Child Care and Early Learning. I moved from that position to become the first Assistant Director for Quality Initiatives and Child Care Licensing Policy, when the WA State Department of Early Learning was formed in 2006. I'm here to share with you my first-hand experiences working with union staff and unionized child care business owners and workers.

During my years working in early learning, I had extensive contact with stakeholder and advocacy groups including union staff. I was working at the division prior to the legislation allowing child care family home providers to unionize and collectively bargain. I was there when the state began the collective bargaining process. I also led the first several months of a negotiated rule making process to cooperatively develop administrative rules for licensed family child care homes with stakeholders including advocates, child care providers, parents and union representatives.

My first contact with union staff came in my work to develop a plan to use federal Child Care Development Fund dollars to improve the quality of child care. We have a strong and active advocacy and professional network interested in improving quality, access and affordability. The advocates and union staff were all on the same page in their interest. On the agenda was developing a quality rating

and improvement system, expanding college scholarships for providers, increasing wages tied to increased education and increasing the subsidy rate. We used the federal quality dollars to make limited progress on a few of these issues, but there was little success obtaining additional state funds for these efforts.

The advocates and researchers had done a great job of educating our legislature on the importance of early learning and the connection between early childhood development and later success in school and life. Many legislators can cite the returns on investment for early childhood programs and are familiar with the importance of brain development in the earliest years. Yet, early learning was not receiving much in the way of state funding.

I don't believe the child care advocates, child care providers and parents had a well enough organized effort to have a major impact on budget decisions. It took the union to bring providers together in an organized way to have a strong enough voice to have a significant impact on budget discussions.

The union was very effective in advocating for increasing funding for child care. For several years prior to collective bargaining, subsidy rates remained flat, while prices for private pay children increased. In the first collective bargaining agreement, subsidy rates increased 7% in year one and an additional 3% in year two. Providers negotiated for additional training. Funds were set aside for health care for providers. In addition, the state decided to also increase subsidy rates for child care centers to maintain equity.

Collective bargaining required the Governor to think about how much funding to make available to child care the bargaining process. It caused the legislature to consider the proposed agreement bargained between the state and the union. Without collective bargaining and a coordinated voice for the thousands of child care providers we would never have seen such a consideration for enhanced funding for early learning.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.