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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget Proposal Re: Office of Early Childhood
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Thursday, February 21, 2013**

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations 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.

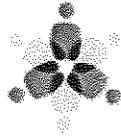
I am here to testify on elements of the Governor's budget plan concerning early childhood programs and services. The Governor's plan maintains funding for core programs, such as School Readiness, Child Day Care, and State Funded Head Start while increasing funding for Community Plans for Early Childhood, Improving Early Literacy and Parent Trust Fund.

While most of the elements are very positive, the Alliance is very concerned about the proposed elimination of **Even Start and After School** funding within the State Department of Education budget. State-funded After School serves 5,000 children grades K-12 in 61 sites in 27 cities and towns and employs 500 people. Even Start programs provide intensive family literacy services involving parents and children in an effort to help parents become full partners in the education of their children. **We urge the Appropriations Committee to reinstate funding for these two vital programs for children and families.**

The rest of my testimony will focus on the Governor's budget proposal to create an **Office of Early Childhood**, bringing together early childhood services and programs from five state agencies: SDE, DSS, DPH, DDS, and BOR.

The Alliance commends the State Legislature for its vision in P.A. 11-181, which was instrumental and lead to this proposal for a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated early childhood system. We also want to recognize the rigorous work of Myra Jones-Taylor, the Early Childhood Planning Director, and her team, Carla Schechter and Mara Saladi, over the past nine months in researching and pulling together the best pieces of different early childhood systems from model states.

Ground-breaking brain research demonstrates the critical need to start early, at birth, to improve a child's ability to succeed in so many ways, in play, school, relationships, work, and in life. Connecticut's policy leaders have understood this and have smartly invested in young children for many years. Establishing an Office of Early Childhood will build on and leverage those investments. Establishing an Early Childhood Office comes at a time when President Obama is leading the charge to invest more deeply in early childhood, starting at birth through pre-K.



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The Governor's plan is a bold and innovative step that will bring cohesiveness to the currently fragmented and piecemeal array of early childhood services. The Office of Early Childhood will take into the account the whole child from birth to five; it is far more than pre-school. The goal is to improve access, pathways, quality, transparency, and accountability so that everyone benefits: young children, parents, providers, and communities.

A distinct Office of Early Childhood, reporting directly to the Governor, creates one place for the coordination and delivery of early childhood services and allows for the focus and attention that young children deserve. By coordinating early childhood services, leveraging resources, and creating better efficiencies, the state will be able to identify gaps in services, critical needs, and make informed funding and policy decisions.

Placing the Office of Early Childhood in the State Department of Education for "Administrative Purposes Only" is a smart and cost-effective model that allows for backroom functions to be shared, such as payroll, legal, and information technology. SDE is the logical APO agency because it helps to bridge Pre-K through Grade 3 alignment efforts.

Parents and children must be front and center in the establishment and implementation of this new Office. This is not about moving blocks from one place to another. It must be about creating clear pathways to services for parents and children. It must be about improving access, quality and affordability. It must reflect local community expertise, voice and needs. Ultimately, it must be about achieving better developmental outcomes for children.

This proposal also impacts state agency staff and community providers. It is imperative that this is done right and people are treated with integrity and respect. This is a unique opportunity to bring people who are passionate about young children together to work hand in hand for better outcomes for children.

The Governor's budget proposes new funding for the creation of four new positions, consulting services, and start-up costs for a total of \$774,747 in FY14, \$935,839 in FY15, and \$967,010 in FY16. In addition, the Graustein Memorial Fund has a match offer of up to \$1 million over two years to support the new Office of Early Childhood to: 1) support state agency managers with the new transition through technical assistance and training; 2) fund continued planning as the new office is implemented; and 3) support a private/public partnership through creation of a nonprofit entity. The leveraged funds would support a partnership between the state, philanthropy, and communities.

The Alliance urges the Appropriations Committee to support the Governor's early childhood proposal. It is a bold step that Connecticut needs to make.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.