

**Testimony to the Education Committee**  
**February 15, 2013**  
**On HB 6359 - An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System**

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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony.

The Middlesex Coalition for Children – an advocacy organization which since 1992 has been working to improve the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County – supports HB 6359 as strongly as it has ever supported a bill before the legislature.

The Coalition is a member of the Early Childhood Alliance. It has been an active participant in the many years of work that have led to the great system-building initiative outlined in this bill. Over time a partnership has been forged – as the Governor graciously acknowledged -- between state government, on the one hand, and practitioners and policy advocates in the field. HB 6359 represents the consensus of that partnership about how to move services for early childhood forward in Connecticut.

This broad consensus is a major reason for confidence that the reorganization and transformation of state government envisaged by HB 6359 will be a success. A deeper reason is that the new agency described in HB 6359 is shaped by an emerging understanding among scholars and policy makers of how critical and irreversible are children's experiences from birth to 5, and how interrelated different aspects of early development are. Only a comprehensive, integrated approach can ensure that our children – especially our most vulnerable children – get a successful start in life.

This integrated approach to early childhood has made some progress at the local level in Connecticut. In Middlesex County the Coalition and its allies began with preschool for 3 and 4 year olds, then turned our attention to the physical and mental health of young children, and then to building developmental programs for children 0 – 3 and strengthening families. A comprehensive Office of Early Childhood will provide the support this local work needs to be fully effective.

HB 6359 is the leap forward our state needs to make. We urge the Education Committee to speed it on its way, and all legislators to support its passage – and to support the allocation in the Governor's budget necessary to get the Office established.