



**Testimony before the Education Committee
Submitted by David Kennedy for Right from the Start
Friday, February 15, 2013**

Good morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is David Kennedy. I am the chief operating officer for the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County and a member of the Achievement Gap Task Force created under PA 11-85. I am also a member of Right from the Start, and I speak today in that capacity.

I am here today in support of House Bill 6359, An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System, which creates a new structure for early childhood services in Connecticut and an Office of Early Childhood.

Right from the Start is an initiative undertaken in 2010 as a response to the outcry from parents, early care providers, and community stakeholders to create a coordinated, comprehensive early care and education system. A diverse group of advocates, practitioners, and parents has met regularly over the past two years (convened by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund) to envision a system that will work better for Connecticut families than what is currently in place.

Right from the Start's vision is simple. When it comes to an early childhood system:

- Early is good, earlier is better;
- Pay attention to the whole child (including his/her physical and mental health);
- Mind the opportunity gap— i.e., develop a system that addresses racial and economic disparities;
- Support local community action – i.e., invite and respect local voices.

These are the core commitments of Right from the Start. And in our opinion, HB 6359 hits a home run in beginning to put this vision into action.

We are excited about the proposed legislation as a BOLD and innovative step on behalf of all of Connecticut's young children and their families. We concur wholeheartedly with the vision put forth by the Early Childhood Planning Team for a "coordinated system of programs and policies aimed at promoting optimal growth and development of all children in Connecticut during the early childhood period (prenatal to kindergarten entry)."

Research and experience confirm the importance of the early years in determining the life success of our citizens, and mitigating the achievement gap between affluent and poor children. We applaud the Governor and Connecticut's legislative and agency leadership for focusing on this issue, even as they confront a myriad of challenges in our difficult economy.

A central focus of the *Right from the Start* effort has been systems—what they are, why they fail, and how they can prosper. What has become clear as we've explored systems thinking is that successful systems are united by a common vision and agreed upon agenda, shared measurement of outcomes, and an effective communications strategy. A single agency focused on the needs of young children is far more likely to accommodate these elements than the disparate system that currently exists in Connecticut.

We envision a Connecticut where all parents and caregivers can access the quality services they need to provide our children the best chance for success—where there is "no wrong door" for parents to get what they need, and where communities directly inform policy, coordinate services, and deliver programs. We believe that the centralization of early childhood activities in the Office of Early Childhood, at a minimum of new costs, will serve our state well and put Connecticut in the forefront among states dedicated to developing strong families and a vibrant workforce.

Thank you for your consideration. And if you'd like to learn more about *Right from the Start*, just Google "Right from the Start CT".

Sincerely,

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