

THAMES VALLEY COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY ACTION, INC.

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Deborah Monahan, Executive Director



Testimony before the Education Committee HB 6359: An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System February 15, 2013

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Deborah Monahan. I am the Executive Director of the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, serving Southeastern Connecticut. TVCCA has operated the Early Childhood Programs throughout New London County for over 37 years. We currently operate School Readiness programs, Head Start, Early Head Start and State funded Early Childhood programs. Monday through Friday, TVCCA serves over 800 children ranging in ages from 6 weeks to 5 years.

I could not be present this morning, but would like to offer my testimony in reference to HB 6358, *An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System*.

Overall, HB 6359 will be an improvement for everyone in the early childhood system giving the early childhood services the focus and attention they deserve. The Office of Early Childhood would be the center for the coordination, cohesion and delivery of early childhood services that currently are fragmented among at least 5 state agencies. This would be a huge step forward in simplifying processes and ultimately ensuring the highest quality of care and education for our youngest citizens. The biggest beneficiaries of the Office of Early Childhood are the children and the families in Connecticut that will be served.

HB 6359 is a good step forward for early childhood. Staff qualification requirements have been extended for three more years and that is positive and will give the Office time to work with providers in achieving this standard. Five year contracts promote stability and quality and this is a good move. The center licensing responsibility under the Office is another excellent step in promoting a seamless system for quality early childhood.

HOWEVER: TVCCA is a provider that has 4 CHEFA child care facilities tied to this funding. I am dismayed and very concerned about the change from last year's bill introduced by Senator Beth Bye. HB 6359 reads (line 362) *...facilities that have been approved to operate a child care program financed through the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority and have received a commitment for debt service from the Department of Social Services pursuant to section 17b-749i, are given priority for award"* .

In last year's bill, the language in the bill was that these CHEFA facilities "**are exempt from the requirement of issuance**". Given the fact that these facilities are bonded monies and that the agencies that hold these facilities are responsible for the debt along with the State of Connecticut for up to 30 years, why would the state want to put those CHEFA programs in jeopardy of funding if these agencies are meeting the standards established and already operating high quality, NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accredited programs? This is of deep concern to me and should be looked at very closely. I urge you to keep the original language that the CHEFA facilities "*...are exempt from the requirement of issuance.*"

There are over \$50 million of bonded CHEFA child care centers throughout the state and this bill does not give those programs the assurance that they need to remain financially stable. This could impact the overall bond rating of the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony. I am sincerely grateful.

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