

Education Committee Public Hearing

Friday, February 15, 2013

Testimony Regarding House Bill 6359, An Act Concerning An Early Childhood System

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Edie Reichard and I am submitting testimony in support of H. B. 6359, "An Act Concerning An Early Childhood System". The bill before you seeks to coordinate publicly funded programs serving children birth to five and their families. I applaud the vision and effort the Governor and staff directed to craft this historic legislation that will create a unified Office of Early childhood, bringing together diverse programs including childhood care, school readiness, home visitation services, birth to three services, and functions of licensing for child care businesses.

I am the Director of Sleeping Giant Day Care, Inc. in Hamden. Sleeping Giant Day Care has been a state funded program for 34 years. I have also been the director of a School Readiness Program in Bridgeport. Both of these programs have wonderful services for children and families. My hope is to see these programs functioning side by side within the same system allowing for better partnerships, easier access to funding streams, shared resources and many other combined functions.

I am the representative on the Early Childhood Cabinet for the State Funded Centers and the secretary for the State Funded Director's Forum. I have seen many changes over the years and this Office is a move in the right direction. Representatives of the State Funded Child Care Centers have served on several work groups charged with developing the framework, mission and goals of the new Office and I believe the new Office holds out hope for a more integrated seamless system to serve Connecticut's children and their families.

Today there are 102 State Funded Centers located in 53 municipalities, staffed by 1800 qualified teachers, serving 4,300 children including infants/toddlers and their families. Established over 40 years ago pursuant to CGA8-210, the Centers provide affordable, quality child care for low and moderate income working families.

The New Office will assume the responsibilities as the "lead agency for child care" currently in the Department of Social Services. State funded centers are an integral component of the child care business sector in Connecticut and I appreciate the Legislature's commitment to funding and sustaining these services.

The State funded Centers were recently moved to the State Department of Education and we have worked with them to better coordinate child care services with Connecticut's School Readiness Program. Focusing on common core elements to both programs including requirements for NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accreditation and staffing requirements, we have fashioned a stronger consolidated system. At the same time we have urged state officials to recognize our uniqueness and maintain the integrity of our mission to provide quality, affordable child care for working families. The Bill before you maintains support for state funded child care centers and our role in the early childhood system.

In order to ensure accountability in the new system, we recommend that the new Office report to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the new Office and report on improved child outcomes. We also urge you to maintain 211 services as a critical component to the early childhood system.

Families in Connecticut will benefit from a centralized Office dedicated to early childhood services and I look forward to working with state officials to ensure a smooth transition in the coming months.

Thank you for your consideration of my remarks.

Edie Reichard

