



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

My name is Edith Pollock Karsky and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFA). I could not be here today but wanted to take this opportunity to comment on the proposal for the creation of the Office of Early Childhood, which will serve to coordinate the administration of all early childhood programs. We think this proposal should benefit all children in the state, especially those children and the families served by Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs).

By way of background, the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFA) is the voice of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies. These are the local agencies designated by the federal and state governments as partners in helping people work their way out of poverty. Our network serves all 169 cities and towns utilizing a Results Based Accountability framework to report our outcomes. We collaborate across silos with state government to help families avoid financial crisis, and empower people with job training, energy assistance, child care, and other vital supports to regain their financial footing if they do experience poverty. We administer economic empowerment programs to more than 300,000 people annually, empowering families and strengthening communities in each and every part of the state.

Offering Head Start and other critical School Readiness programs across Connecticut, our member CAAs serve as affordable child care providers to our state's lower-income, working families. These programs ensure a positive environment for children while their parents work or further their education. Our sliding fee schedules make our services affordable to all.

As long-term providers of early care and education, we have made significant strides in improving quality over the last 20 years by:

- Raising the qualifications of staff through education and ongoing trainings (i.e. most lead teachers in our programs have bachelor's degree in early childhood development and education),
- Implementing research-based curricula that interface with the local school systems' academic readiness expectations to ensure smooth transitions to kindergarten, and
- Applying CHEFA bond funding to significantly improve our program facilities.

This all goes to show the progress that has been made as well as our commitment to excellence, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the Office of Early Childhood as we move forward. Effective, outcome-driven programs are in everyone's best interest, but I would like to bring to your attention one of our major concerns with the proposal before you. Many of the Community Action Agency Early Childhood Education providers have CHEFA-financed facilities and this funding agreement with the state needs special consideration when changes to the system are considered.

If special consideration is not given in any new process, what happens to programs' CHEFA-financed agreements and obligations? These facilities are financed with state bonding and 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 now want to put such CHEFA programs in jeopardy of funding collapse if these agencies are meeting the standards established and already operating high quality, NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accredited programs?

**We ask you to respect agency obligations under CHEFA – these obligations are very stringent and the loans were acquired with the explicit understanding that the provider would be the operator of the program throughout the obligation period for CHEFA financing.**

We share the goal of empowering every child to reach his or her potential through an engaging ECE experience, and Connecticut's Community Action Agencies are a vital part of realizing this goal for Connecticut's children and Connecticut's future. We are pleased to join this important conversation, and we thank you for your consideration.