

## **TESTIMONY TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE CONCERNING HOUSE BILL 6359**

**SUBMITTED BY FREDRICK W. JACKSON – FEBRUARY 14, 2013**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee

My name is Fredrick Jackson and I come before your Committee wearing several hats today: Co-Chair of the Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children, member of Bridgeport's School Readiness Council, and member of the Steering Committee for the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. In addition, I am pleased to also represent the Social Justice Committee of Connecticut's Episcopal Diocese – which has identified early childhood as one of its key advocacy areas.

My objective is to convey strong support for House Bill 6359 – which is a bold, innovative, and major step forward for Connecticut's children.

By now, the importance of early childhood is much more widely accepted than it was seven years ago when I unexpectedly found myself as the only businessman locked up with 60 experts in early childhood charged with drafting Bridgeport's Blueprint for Young Children! I now know full well that the first five years of life set the stage for success – or failure – throughout the rest of a child's life. We also know that dollars spent in effective early care programs have a significant payback for society in increased academic success, lower involvement in criminal activity, less unemployment, etc.

While there are a number of details to be worked out as this Bill goes through the legislative process, the design and scope of the new Office address the basic challenges facing efforts to improve early childhood programs – consolidating programs now spread across five Agencies under the management of one Director, who will report to the Governor. I believe that this office offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to beginning building a SYSTEM of care for Connecticut's children that will allow us to deliver these services in a considerably more effective, efficient, AND measurable way.

As you study this proposal, I would also urge you to examine the work being done by the local Early Childhood Collaboratives active in many of our towns and cities. This examination should include how to best support their efforts and how their voice might be better heard in places such as the early Childhood Cabinet.

Finally, I'd like to comment on the process that resulted in this proposal – which stands as unique in my experience. This effort involved the full breadth of the Early Care Community in setting out the challenges they face, the work of the Legislature in crafting 11-181, the continuing participation of the philanthropic community, the ongoing support for early childhood programs by the Governor, and the efforts of the Planner, Dr. Jones-Taylor to reach out – and listen - to all parts of the early care community while developing the Administration's proposal.