



**Testimony before the Education Committee
Governor's H.B. 6359 – An Act Concerning An Early Childhood System
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
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Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth to age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

I am here today to strongly support the **Governor's H.B. 6359 – An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System**. This bill creates an Office of Early Childhood, reporting directly to the Governor, and brings together early childhood services and programs from five state agencies: SDE, DSS, DPH, DDS, and BOR.

The Alliance commends the State Legislature for its vision in P.A. 11-181, which was instrumental and lead to this proposal for a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated early childhood system. We also want to recognize the rigorous work of Myra Jones-Taylor, the Early Childhood Planning Director, and her team, Carlotta Schechter and Mara Saladi, over the past nine months in researching and pulling together the best pieces of different early childhood systems from other states.

Ground-breaking brain research demonstrates the critical need to start early, at birth, to improve a child's ability to succeed in so many ways, in play, school, relationships, work, and in life. Connecticut's policy leaders have understood this and have smartly invested in young children for many years. Establishing an Office of Early Childhood will build on and leverage those investments.

The Governor's plan is a bold and innovative step that will bring cohesiveness to the currently fragmented and piecemeal array of early childhood services. The Office of Early Childhood will take into the account the whole child from birth to five; it is far more than preschool. The goal is to improve access, pathways, quality, transparency, and accountability so that everyone benefits: young children, parents, providers, and communities.

A distinct Office of Early Childhood that reports directly to the Governor creates one place for the coordination and delivery of early childhood services and allows for the focus and attention that young children deserve. By coordinating early childhood services, leveraging resources, and creating better efficiencies, the state will be able to identify gaps in services, critical needs, and



make informed funding and policy decisions. Placing the Office of Early Childhood in the State Department of Education for “Administrative Purposes Only” is a smart and cost-effective model that allows for backroom functions to be shared, such as payroll, legal, and information technology. SDE is the logical APO agency because it helps to bridge Pre-K through Grade 3 alignment efforts.

Parents and children must be front and center in the establishment and implementation of this new Office. This is not about moving blocks from one place to another. It must be about creating clear pathways to services for parents and children. It must be about improving access, quality and affordability. It must reflect local community expertise, voice and needs. Ultimately, it must be about achieving better developmental outcomes for children.

This is large bill with many parts and it is no surprise that some language will require clarification. One section addressing changes to the School Readiness statute seems to be aimed at providing greater flexibility. As the bill moves forward it will be important to get a better understanding of how these changes will work, and ensure the bill language matches the intent. We will gladly be available as a resource to the Legislature, the Planning Team, and the Administration to help in this process.

H.B. 6359 is the bold leap forward our state needs to make. The Alliance urges the Education Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.