

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 Mary Cecchinato 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. We applaud the vision and effort the Governor and staff directed to crafting this historic legislation that will create a unified Office of Early Childhood, bringing together diverse programs including child care, school readiness, home visitation services, birth to three services and functions of licensing for child care businesses.

I am the Executive Director of the Torrington Child care Center Inc. for 28 years. During that time I have seen and been through many changes. I have both State funded Child Care and School Readiness slots. Each of these programs is unique and my hope is that with this new office it will allow us to have one system with different programs under that system. I believe the new Office holds out hope for a more integrated seamless system to serve children and families.

Today there are 102 State Funded Centers located in 53 municipalities, staffed by 1800 qualified teachers, serving 4,300 children including 1200 infants and toddlers. Established over forty 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 we appreciate the Legislature's commitment to funding and sustainability of our services.

After the State Funded Centers were moved to the State Department of Education we worked with SDE to better coordinate child care services with Connecticut's School Readiness Program. Focusing on common elements to both programs including requirements for NAEYC 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 original 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 annually 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 we look forward to working with state officials to ensure a smooth transition in the coming months. You for your consideration of our remarks Thank.

Mary Cecchinato

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