



*Testimony before the Education Committee
HB 6359, An Act Concerning An Early Childhood System*

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February 15, 2013

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, I am Peter Palermino, Program Manager for Family and Housing Services at the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS). I am here on behalf of Commissioner Roderick Bremby to testify in support of the Governor's Bill 6359, An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System. I also serve as Connecticut's designated administrator for the federal Child Care and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Block Grants. In my role as Connecticut's child care administrator, I have been responsible for completion of Connecticut's federal plan and application since the inception of the federal Child Care Block Grant in 1990.

The Department of Social Services is currently the lead agency for child care services and the Child Care and TANF Block Grants. Our department and its predecessor agencies have funded and coordinated child care programs and services for over 40 years. We have contributed to the implementation of many historic child care initiatives in Connecticut. We now stand ready to assist the Governor and General Assembly with the design and implementation of the Office of Early Childhood as delineated in the Governor's proposal.

DSS has been working very closely with the current Early Childhood Education (ECE) Cabinet and the Governor's Early Childhood Planning Office to thoroughly review the existing child care system components and develop the necessary processes to ensure that we have an early childhood system that is efficient, accountable and second to none. Our planning efforts have led to an interactive and open process enabling many child care and early education constituents to participate in the design of Connecticut's early childhood system. We have debated values, principles, agency consolidations and identified gaps in necessary services to ensure we meet the needs of Connecticut child care consumers, child care providers and, most importantly, the children who participate at such settings. The ECE Cabinet and the Early Childhood Planning office has listened and deliberated in a very open and professional manner.

DSS is fully committed and prepared to work with the new leadership at the Office of Early Childhood to ensure a successful transition of the department's programs included

in the proposed legislation. However, our work will not end once the programs are transitioned. We will continue as an active partner with our colleagues on the Early Childhood Cabinet. We will collaborate with OCE leadership and staff to insure that low-income clients served by our department continue to access child care services throughout the state to attain and retain employment and access other DSS-administered benefits such as health, food, and energy assistance.

Under the Governor's proposal, lead status for the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) will transfer from DSS to OCE. The CCDBG Block Grant provides Connecticut with an annual federal contribution of \$51 million to support the many child care system components. The following programs and funding will also transfer to the new department:

- Care 4 Kids child care assistance program that helps families receiving cash assistance and other low-income families pay for child care;
- The statewide child care 211 resource and referral service, and
- Funding that supports the Board of Regents' CT Charts a Course career development program for caregivers.

DSS will work to ensure a smooth and seamless transition for both child care consumers and providers in the creation of the new department.

Coordinating the state's child care services has several advantages over the existing system. It will be more consumer-friendly and will be considerably easier to navigate for potential and existing consumers and early care providers. Under the current system, DSS administers the Care 4 Kids program, the State Department of Education (SDE) operates the school readiness and state contracted child center programs, the Department of Public Health regulates the early care providers and SDE, DSS and the Board of Regents all fund early care career development programs. This disjointed system can be confusing to consumers and child care providers, often leading to misinformation and unclear outcomes.

Bill 6359 presents a sound rationale to consolidate early care and child care-related programs into one entity – the Office of Early Care. By doing this, child care consumers' and providers' ability to find their way to needed support will be enhanced.

We applaud the work and efforts of fellow ECE Cabinet colleagues and the Governor's Early Childhood Planning Office, and look forward to assisting with the development of the new Office of Early Childhood.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions you may have.