

Testimony Supporting HB 6359: An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System

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Education Committee

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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, an independent, research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We strongly support HB 6359: An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System, which establishes a new Office of Early Childhood. This bill is the culmination of tremendous work on the part of many. It would not have been possible without the support of this legislature, which passed PA 11-181, creating the planning process to develop an early childhood system blueprint. Strong support for early childhood on the part of Governor Malloy was also invaluable. And the Early Childhood Planning Team, led by Myra Jones-Taylor, put in many months of hard work collecting information, listening to stakeholders across the state, identifying the best pieces of systems from other states, and crafting a thoughtful framework for Connecticut.

We have long advocated for the creation of a separate department to better consolidate and coordinate early childhood services. National research supports this observation as well – fragmented ECE delivery systems “limit effectiveness in delivering a seamless continuum of services to children and families, who may frequently utilize services across these siloed systems, experiencing cumbersome and duplicative processes, varied eligibility and enrollment requirements, and undue inconvenience.”¹ This proposal draws on the **strengths of a separate department** – independence, autonomy, and consolidation of many programs under one roof – while also benefiting from **significant cost savings through administrative support from the State Department of Education.** We therefore strongly support the creation of an Office of Early Childhood housed in the State Department of Education for administrative purposes only.

We believe that this proposal does a commendable job of addressing the **5 key elements of successful early care and education systems as identified by the BUILD Initiative**, a national research-based think tank and consulting organization that studies and helps to develop state- and federal-level early care and education systems. **The new system outlined in HB 6359** recognizes that:

1. A comprehensive early childhood system includes early learning, health, mental health, nutrition, family support, and early intervention;²
2. Early childhood governance structures that control federal and state funds and how they are spent are more successful than those structures that do not have this control;³

¹ See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *BUILD* (November 2010) on pg. 11.

² See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *The BUILD Initiative* (November 2010) on pg. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

3. Data are crucial to the effectiveness, transparency, and successful outcomes of an early childhood system.⁴
4. Public-private partnership and local-level system building efforts are beneficial to system stability.⁵
5. Legislation to develop a comprehensive, coordinated governance system is the best way to form such a system.⁶

We are very pleased to see that the plan **unites all key programs affecting children birth to five from the State Department of Education, Department of Social Services, Department of Developmental Services, Department of Public Health, and Higher Education Board of Regents**. This Office of Early Childhood will bring together under one roof not only the major early care and education programs (including Care4Kids, School Readiness, Head Start, and State-Funded Centers), but also quality improvement services, licensing, home visitation and family support programs, special education early intervention services, and workforce development initiatives. This broad consolidation reflects a critical understanding of the need to consider not only educational needs of young children, but also health, developmental, and family supports. By drawing on existing staff from these five departments, as well as a few new staff to provide executive and administrative functions, the new Office will benefit from tremendous expertise, while also having the ability to better coordinate between programs, improve efficiency, and reduce redundancy and confusion.

We support the creation of this new Office of Early Childhood because we believe that unifying early childhood services in one location will help create greater coordination and efficiency, reducing confusion for parents and providers and improving outcomes for children. The Office of Early Childhood will provide a strong platform from which the state of Connecticut will address the following **eight fundamental elements of successful early childhood systems**, which have been identified through high-quality research and input from Connecticut’s ECE community:⁷

1. **Uniform reporting requirements** for providers;
2. **Blended and braided state and federal funding sources** to allow early care and education providers to access a single funding stream;
3. **Fully funded services for children aged 0-8** based on evidence and research as to the real cost of high quality care;
4. A **quality rating and improvement system**;
5. Means to **develop our early childhood workforce** and improve this **workforce’s compensation**;
6. **Coordinated data collection** that ensures that data is complete and transparent;
7. **Uniform standards for early learning** that are **developmentally appropriate**; and
8. Improved **outreach to and access for parents**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ These eight fundamental elements were determined through collaborative research and discussion between Connecticut Voices for Children, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). *For more information, see* Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” *Connecticut Voices for Children* (February 2011) on pg. 28-30 (available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/connecticut-early-care-and-education-progress-report-2010>).