



Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget Proposal regarding Office of Early Childhood
Testimony by Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director
Connecticut Parent Power
Thursday, February 21, 2013

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director of Connecticut Parent Power a statewide parent-led organization that engages, educates and mobilizes diverse parents from across the state to act on issues that matter most to them improving outcomes for all children in areas of early childhood, care, education, health care reform and K-12 school systems.

Connecticut Parent Power would like to take a moment to commend the State Legislature for their shared vision in passing Public Act 11-181, which was the driving force that led to developing an Office of Early Childhood. For the past nine months or so, Connecticut Parent Power, alongside statewide partners and most importantly parents have worked together with the Planning Director Team under Myra Jones-Taylor to produce a plan for early childhood that would continue to cultivate a system that works for all children and families.

Although the Governor's plan reflects core funding secured or increased for programs, such as:

- ~ Parent Trust Fund
- ~ State Funded Head Start
- ~ School Readiness
- ~ Improving Early Literacy
- ~ Child Day Care

I am providing testimony this evening to share my concerns regarding the elimination of Even Start and After School funding within the State Department of Education budget, as this will negatively affect over 5,000 children in grade levels K-12 who take pride in participating in out of school time activities in 61 sites across our state.

As a parent-led organization, we pride ourselves on ensuring that programs like Even Start and After School programs are protected as they provide child and family focused literacy services that cultivate a true partnership for parents to work hand in hand in their child's



educational experiences. After School programs employ over 500 constituents a year to ensure that children have access to a safe environment during out of school time hours with quality and engaging age appropriate activities. Therefore, ***we urge you, the Appropriations Committee to reinstate both Even Start and After School funding as they are essential in the lives of our children and their families.***

Additionally, the Governor's Budget proposal emphasizes the creation of an Office of Early Childhood that brings together early childhood services and programs from five state agencies that include SDE, DSS, DDS, BOR and DPH, which we believe is a bold move to build a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated early childhood system.

The Governor's budget plan is an innovative approach that will certainly bring more cohesiveness to the currently fragmented early childhood services. We believe wholeheartedly that the new Office of Early Childhood will embrace the whole child from birth through age five, to ensure a greater start with better future outcomes for all children in all settings. Through this integration of services, our system will cultivate an easier pathway for parents with young children to gain access, quality and transparency into a system that has been too complex to navigate in the past and will be held accountable for the greater good of all children and their communities.

Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. They need the appropriate information in a timely fashion that allow them to lift up their voices to make informed decisions to improve access, quality and affordability to programs that will indeed positively impact the lives of their children. This office with its present construct will be flexible enough to embrace the local community voice at every level - to ensure that no child is forgotten in any community!

This proposal, with an Office of Early Childhood that reports directly to the Governor, will give early childhood services and programs the focus and attention they deserve. This creates one place for the coordination and delivery of early childhood services. As one agency, the state will be able to identify gaps in services and make informed policy decisions.

As you know, research shows that investing early during the youngest years of a child's life, gives us stronger returns in their future (socially, emotionally, physically and academically). The establishment of a new Early Childhood Office comes at a time that is in concert with President Obama who is has begun to lead with a focus on early is good, but earlier is better, when it comes to the investments in children ages birth through five years. Currently, with programs in several different agencies, preventive measures for early childhood is not focused on to attain the maximum benefits from and with our children.



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 that in the end are best for all children and families.

This bold proposal is a win win for Connecticut with the support of the Graustein Memorial Fund who has offered to match up to \$1 million dollars to support the new Office of Early Childhood in areas of transition, training, technical support, seeking funding to continue the implementation of the new early childhood office, and supporting public and private partnerships while leveraging additional opportunities between philanthropy, state partners and communities with a team approach.

Connecticut Parent Power will continue to be available as a resource to the Legislature, the Planning Team, and the Administration to help in any way during this valuable process.

I know you, the Appropriations Committee all care about the wellness of our children and parents by building an early childhood system that works. Connecticut Parent Power, alongside its 3046 parents across the state urge you to support the Governor's early childhood proposal that is clearly the right start for a bold change that will be in the best interest of children and their families.

Although we know that this change impacts so many state agency staff and community providers, we know with carefully thought out transition plans that are respectful of all invested...can make the difference in shaping this change to bring a unified approach in daily practice that other states may replicate in the near future.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify and we look forward to your support.

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