

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2013
On HB 6359 - An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System

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Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony.

The Middlesex Coalition for Children – we have been working since 1992 to improve the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County – **strongly supports HB 6359.**

The Coalition is a member of the Early Childhood Alliance. It has been an active participant in the many years of work that have led to the great system-building initiative outlined in this bill. Over time a partnership has been forged – as the Governor graciously acknowledged -- between state government, on the one hand, and practitioners and policy advocates in the field. **HB 6359 represents the consensus of that partnership about how to move services for early childhood forward in Connecticut.**

This broad consensus is a major reason for confidence that the reorganization and transformation of state government envisaged by HB 6359 will be a success. A deeper reason is that the new agency described in HB 6359 is shaped by an emerging understanding among scholars and policy makers of how critical and irreversible are children's experiences from birth to 5, and how interrelated different aspects of early development are. **Only a comprehensive, integrated approach can ensure that our children – especially our most vulnerable children – get a successful start in life.**

We believe that the programs consolidated in the new Office of Early Childhood are **ALL** necessary to its success. None should be subtracted. **In particular, professional training and workforce development programs need to be in the Office.** In time some programs that are not part of the current plan, especially in the areas of health and child protection, may need to be added. The current design is a start. It should not be scaled back.

This integrated approach to early childhood has made some progress at the local level in Connecticut. In Middlesex County the Coalition and its allies began with preschool for 3 and 4 year olds, then turned our attention to the physical and mental health of young children, and then to building developmental programs for children 0 – 3 and to family strengthening. A comprehensive Office of Early Childhood will provide the support local work needs to be fully effective.

HB 6359 is the leap forward our state needs to make. We urge the Appropriations **Committee to support the full allocation requested in the Governor's budget.** It is a **modest appropriation for a major improvement** in state programs for young children.