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Testimony of
Patti Fusco
PreK-12 Jurisdictional Vice President
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Appropriations Committee Hearing
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HB 5030 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015

SB 26 An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Patti Fusco. I am a teacher in West Haven and serve as AFT Connecticut's Jurisdictional Vice President for our more than 10,000 teachers across the state in our public schools. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on behalf of our members today.

AFT Connecticut applauds Governor Malloy for his desire to create universal access to preschool for low-income three and four year olds. It is only when we as a state begin to address economic inequities and opportunity gaps that we will begin to close the achievement gap. Improving preschool access is by no means a full solution, but it makes a significant down payment on that effort. This proposal builds on the 1,000 slots created in FY 2013 by providing 1,020 new slots in FY 2015 and paves the way for further expansion of up to 3,010 more slots by FY 2019. AFT Connecticut fully supports this proposal.

Quality pre-K programs set children on the path toward lifelong learning success. It is essential that students arrive in Kindergarten ready to learn and this proposal will do that, provided that new slots are created at accredited school readiness programs. Ensuring access is admirable, but only access to quality programs will yield the kinds of results children deserve and the kinds of results worthy of state investment. We encourage legislators to be vigilant in their efforts to make certain that only accredited institutions are eligible to receive funding for new students.

Expanding access to high quality preschool experiences benefits all children, not just those who come from low-income families. Children with learning disabilities can be identified earlier and offered interventions earlier if they are in high quality school readiness programs. Families who opt for more affordable daycare over proven early learning programs would make different choices if tuition were not the primary concern. AFT Connecticut encourages the Governor and the General Assembly to build on the work of providing universal access to pre-K to creating universal preschool for all Connecticut's children.

Lastly, I'd like to mention our support for the CHET Baby Scholars program and encourage you to adopt it. Such a program could be an important vehicle to encourage and help parents, and extended family members, save for college. As teachers, we always want to encourage our students to pursue higher education, but it can be heartbreaking when deserving students are

just not be able to cobble together the funds needed to make it happen. The CHET Baby Scholars proposal makes the dream of higher education more tangible for students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.