ALL OUR KIN INC.
A SAFE AND LOVING PLACE WHERE PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN LEARN

February 13, 2014

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jessica Sager, and I am the Executive Director of All Our Kin, a nationally-recognized, Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains, supports, and sustains family child care providers to ensure that children and families have the foundation they need to succeed in school and in life. Through our programs, child care professionals succeed as business owners; working parents find stable, high-quality care for their children; and children, the workforce of tomorrow, gain an educational foundation that lays the groundwork for achievement in school and beyond. I am here today to offer testimony concerning Connecticut's Care 4 Kids program.

Adequately funding the Care 4 Kids program is a necessary step toward giving Connecticut's children a strong start in life. Adequate funding will allow Care 4 Kids to expand families' access to child care subsidies, increase reimbursement rates, and offer differential rates for infant/toddler caregivers that are sufficient to expand our state's short supply of quality care for our youngest children. We believe that these three steps are essential to giving Connecticut's children the care they need and deserve.

Adequate funding is needed, first and foremost, to ensure access to the program for Connecticut's families, including families earning between 50 percent and 75 percent of the state median income and families with parents searching for a job. Currently, the income guidelines for new Care 4 Kids applicants require families to be below 50 percent of the state median income. Expanding the program eligibility to 75 percent of state median income—which is still less than the 85 percent that federal regulations allow–would enable more working families to access care for their children. We also believe that the Care 4 Kids program should allow parents who are searching for a job to apply for child care assistance. At All Our Kin, we often hear from parents who are having difficulty securing a job because they do not have stable access to child care. Extending Care 4 Kids benefits to parents during their job search would give parents greater flexibility to enter the workforce.

Second, Care 4 Kids needs increased funding in order to increase reimbursement rates for child care providers serving our youngest and most vulnerable children. Connecticut currently sets reimbursement rates at the 60th percentile of the 2001 market rate, according to the Connecticut Department of Social Services Child Care and Development Fund plan. Not only is our state's reimbursement rate in its Care 4 Kids subsidy program below the federally recommended level of 75 percent, but our rates were last updated in 2002.

Inadequate reimbursement rates harm families, providers, and--most importantly--children. Families are prevented from choosing freely among child care programs, since inadequate reimbursement discourages providers from caring for the low-income children who receive child care subsidies. Providers often experience financial hardship as a result of their low compensation, as reimbursements are often their primary source of income. Children also suffer because inadequate subsidy rates negatively impact quality in child care programs. Low rates limit the resources

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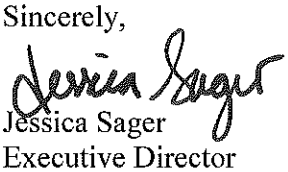
available for program materials and improvements, increase provider stress, and reduce caregivers' longevity in the industry.

Third, we believe that differential rates for infant/toddler care should be increased and extended to family child care, so that family child care providers can meaningfully reduce our state's critical need for quality infant and toddler care. The family child care providers we work with at All Our Kin play a crucial role as teachers of Connecticut's youngest and most vulnerable children. The majority of infants and toddlers are cared for in home-based settings, both licensed and unlicensed, and children with socioeconomic risk factors are most likely to be in home-based child care arrangements. But the supply of infant and toddler care is limited by the fact that family child care providers without an assistant may only care for two children under the age of two. The Care 4 Kids payment differential for family child care providers who care for infants and toddlers should be sufficient to enable these providers to hire an assistant. This would make six infant/toddler slots available in each family child care program, rather than two, and significantly enlarge our early childhood system's capacity to care for children under three.

Care 4 Kids is far more than a workforce development program. By subsidizing slots for infants and toddlers, Care 4 Kids has the potential to ensure that parents have access to high-quality child care, enable providers to provide quality care and early education, and most importantly, help give our state's youngest and most vulnerable children the best start possible. We ask that you provide adequate funding for this important program.

Sincerely,



Jessica Sager
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