



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 testify in support of the Governor's proposed budget and Senate Bill 25, "An Act Establishing an Office of Early Childhood."

The Governor's proposed budget makes necessary investments in expanding access to high quality early education. The proposed budget allocates funding to expand access to pre-kindergarten experiences for low-income children and support the Office of Early Childhood as it coordinates our state's early childhood system.

In particular, we are glad that the budget allocates funding for a 3 percent increase in Care 4 Kids rates for licensed center-based and family child care programs. 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. Raising rates is essential to ensuring that the care provided to participating families is of high quality.

We also commend the Governor for including \$5.8 million in the budget to increase the frequency of licensing inspections and create a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that will improve the quality of care across early learning settings, including family child care. We are extremely supportive of these budget proposals, and we urge the legislature to continue focusing on quality as our state expands its early childhood programs.

We believe that the Office of Early Childhood is the most effective mechanism for creating a system that ensures quality in all child care settings and provides information and access for all Connecticut's families. Prior to last year's Executive Order creating the Office of Early Childhood, families and providers alike were forced to navigate a fragmented and confusing network of programs and services for young children. Although the Office of Early Childhood has begun the systems-level changes required to streamline and bring transparency to our state's early childhood systems, much work remains. At All Our Kin, we see firsthand the difficulties families face as they search for affordable, accessible, quality child care options. Parents report that the current system is confusing and overwhelming; they tell us that they do not know where to go to get the information

that they need, and that they become discouraged and exhausted in their attempts to navigate the current fragmented system.

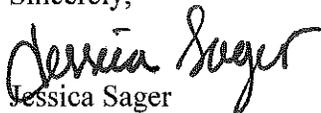
We also see the need for a unified system for providers, specifically family child care providers. Too often, family child care providers are forgotten or left out of professional development opportunities and funding streams that can raise the quality of their work. Yet family child care providers play a crucial role in our state as caregivers of Connecticut's youngest and most vulnerable children. The majority of infants and toddlers are cared for in home-based child care settings, both licensed and unlicensed, and children with socioeconomic risk factors are most likely to be in home-based child care. In December of 2013, over 3,000 low-income children receiving Connecticut's Care 4 Kids subsidies were cared for by family child care providers. Family child care programs are essential to meeting the need for infant and toddler care, as well as the need for affordable, second- and third-shift, and culturally diverse care.

At All Our Kin, we have demonstrated that with sufficient investment, incentives, and support, family child care programs can meet high levels of quality. However, for providers to meet the levels of quality that all Connecticut's children deserve, we must create an early childhood system in which these essential caregivers are included as full participants, a system that recognizes and rewards them for excellence, offers incentives for professional development, and holds them to high standards of quality.

We applaud the state of Connecticut for recognizing the need to coordinate our state's early childhood programs and services, and believe that the Office of Early Childhood is ideally situated to lead our state toward creating such a system. In the past six months, the Office has already begun to shape statewide conversations on how best to improve outcomes for children. In the future, we expect that the Office will take the lead on issues including licensing and professional development for providers, family engagement, the creation of early screening and referral systems, and coordination of data collection. These steps are essential if we are to create a comprehensive, coordinated system of programs and services that will provide for all of Connecticut's children.

We believe that the Governor's proposed budget is a strong budget for children, and that the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood is crucial to the well-being of children, families, and child care providers across Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jessica Sager
Executive Director
All Our Kin, Inc.