

TESTIMONY OF JANET STOLFI ALFANO, MSW
Appropriations Committee
February 24, 2014

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano, and I am the Executive Director of The Diaper Bank. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this evening.

I support the creation and funding in legislation of the Office of Early Childhood; this Office will be an important factor in coordinating existing as well as new early childhood programs in CT.

A mountain of research demonstrates that investing in early childhood care and education pays off in the long run. Children enter school ready to learn and succeed in school and life. Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, the business community, superintendents, and the state's largest teachers union have all stood in support of early childhood initiatives to help close the country's worst achievement gap.

Armed with this knowledge, how do we improve early childhood initiatives in Connecticut so that all children are ready for the challenges that face them in school and in life?

First, we must begin at birth. From birth, all children need language-rich, developmentally-appropriate, stimulating environments that encourage brain development, language, early literacy skills, and social-emotional competence. Brain development in the early years is rapid – by age 3, 80% of brain growth is complete. What happens in the first few years can alter the path to success.

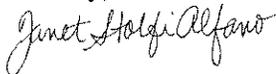
Second, we must ensure that children's basic needs are met in order for them to learn. A child who is hungry or cold is going to have a more difficult time learning than one who has three nutritious meals and a warm bed to sleep in. Something as simple as a lack of diaper access can alter the success path. Safety-net programs, including SNAP and WIC, do not cover the cost of diapers, which can run from \$80-\$100 per month. This leads to increased economic instability and a continuation of the cycle of poverty.

Third, we must adequately fund early childhood education. One of the key findings of the *CT Voices for Children Early Care and Education Progress Report* was Connecticut's early care and education programs in 2011 were funded at more than 10% below 2002 levels. We cannot ensure access, quality, and trained teachers if funding for early childhood education is continually reduced.

And last, but certainly not least, we must better coordinate our current efforts to achieve better outcomes. Programs often operate in isolation, in multiple state agencies. A lack of coordination means inefficiencies and lost opportunities to enhance outcomes for children. Establishment of a coordinated system will result in better access to early childhood education and result in better outcomes when it comes to our achievement gap.

As our state focuses on education, we must remember that early childhood is the foundation for closing the achievement gap.

Sincerely,



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