



Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies

Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee March 7, 2014

RE: SB 340 – An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan

Submitted by: Kim O’Rielly, President & CEO
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Greetings Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kim O’Rielly and I am President and CEO of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies. The CT Council of Family Service Agencies is a statewide network of fourteen independent, non-profit, family service agencies that deliver services to over 150,000 families annually from more than 100 sites located throughout Connecticut. Our network of agencies provide a full complement of family supportive services from birth to old age, with the goal to strengthen individuals and families. We believe all families have a right to success and that the services we deliver as member agencies are to empower people to move forward in their lives.

On behalf of the Council I am pleased to submit this testimony in support of SB 340, An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan, which would authorize the Office of Early Childhood to establish a two-generational school readiness plan to promote long-term learning and economic success for low income families by addressing intergenerational barriers to school readiness and workforce readiness. CCFSAs’ network of family service agencies works with the specific population that would benefit from this two-generational approach through our statewide Safety Net Services Network (SNSN). SNSN provides support to low income families with children, who are at risk of losing or have lost their cash assistance through Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA), Connecticut’s version of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF).

Families served in SNSN are primarily young female single parent mothers with an average age of 22-24 years, and who have on average 2 children. The Safety Net Program helps these families address their multiple barriers to employment that may include the parent’s mental health issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, transportation and lack of education as well as their children’s developmental, educational and psychosocial issues and need for childcare. Through our comprehensive assessment process, we identify the multiple barriers inclusive of

the whole family – and work to connect these families to the appropriate services that benefit both the parent and child(ren). With 36% of our parents having less than an 8th grade education and 82% being unemployed, there is an urgent need for supports that would enable the parents to acquire their GED, access higher education and obtain the necessary skills for sustainable employment. At the same time, the children of these parents need access to quality childcare and early learning to promote healthy development. Families referred to our services are at the highest risk and are in danger of losing the limited support they receive from TFA. We are called in late in the process to provide a Safety Net for these families – and we do. However, there is a need to intervene earlier before families in poverty become at risk for homelessness, child endangerment or poor developmental or psychosocial outcomes. A two-generational school readiness plan would provide early intervention services to low income families, connecting children to high quality preschool and their parents to education and jobs skills needed for self-sufficiency. Services provide earlier may prevent families from needing the Safety Net services later on and provide for improved outcomes for both the parent and the child.

On behalf of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies and the families we serve, I urge you to support SB 340, An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan. Thank you for your time and consideration of the critical needs of young children and their families.