

Testimony in Support of S.B. 340: An Act Concerning A Two-Generational School Readiness Plan

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Appropriations Committee
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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children Supports S.B. 340, An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan, with modification as explained below. The bill requires 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.”¹ Research shows that two-generational plans, “*which focus on creating opportunities for and meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their parents together, move the whole family toward educational success and economic security.*”²

A two-generational school readiness plan recognizes that affordable, high-quality early care and education is essential to Connecticut's children and families. As stated in the proposed legislation, the plan must include promoting and prioritizing access to high-quality preschool for three and four-year-old children who are living in poverty. Children who attend nurturing, responsive, and language-rich early care and education programs are more likely to be prepared socially and academically for kindergarten, less likely to be retained or need special education services, and more likely to graduate from high school and become productive members of the workforce.³ However, **childcare continues to be unaffordable for many Connecticut families**, with the average cost of center care for a preschooler reaching almost \$11,000 per year.⁴ Despite recommendations that child care for all families consume no more than 10% of a family's budget, for a single mother of two earning 75% of the state median income (\$64,999) with a preschooler and a toddler in center-based care, 37% of her pre-tax income would be devoted to childcare.⁵

Moreover, a two-generational plan takes into account the fact that **children do well when families do well.** The proposed plan includes providing the parents of children living in poverty with the opportunity to acquire their high school diplomas, adult education, and technical skills to increase their employability and sustainable employment. Last year, more than a quarter (27% or 10,457) of the Connecticut women who gave birth had a high school education or less.⁶ A high school education – if not a college education – is a necessity for economic stability in Connecticut. Higher levels of education reduce the risk of unemployment. In 2012, unemployment in Connecticut for those with less than a high school degree was 23%, while unemployment for those with a high school degree was 11% and unemployment for those with a bachelor's degree or higher was 4%. Similarly, the well-educated in Connecticut earn significantly more than those without a high school degree, or those with only a high school degree.⁷ A parent's level of educational attainment has a strong correlation with children's economic and education outcomes.⁸ To this end, a two-generational plan should help implement crucial educational and workforce supports to increase economic opportunity for low-income families.

Overall, we support this bill, but suggest the following changes:

- **The bill should be amended in order for the Plan to cover families earning 75% of state median income**, rather than “75% of the federal poverty level” (as currently specified in the bill). Affordable, safe, and quality facilities for children are necessary for parents to work and support their families. Nearly three-quarters of young children in Connecticut have all parents in their home working.⁹ In 2013, approximately 84% of infants and toddlers and 25% of preschoolers living under 75% of the State Median Income did not receive any subsidies for early care and education.¹⁰
- **The legislation should change Care4Kids eligibility criteria to ensure that the program be open to parents who are striving to complete school or further their education**, and not only to parents who are working. The Care4Kids budget must be increased to accommodate this expansion.
- **The committee should consider other best practices for two-generational plans**. As identified by a 2014 Aspen Institute study, these elements include: **educational supports**, such as linking early childhood development programs and higher education, and raising the education levels and supports of the early childhood workforce; **economic supports**, such as building financial education and family assets, and protecting economic gains through continuity and bundling of supports; and **social capital supports** such as developing strong parent-child relationships early, and supporting parent engagement in early childhood through social networks.¹¹
- **The proposed plan should be sure to look towards these organizations in Connecticut that are successfully utilizing two-generational programming**, such as All Our Kin and Even Start, as models to be emulated.¹²

By “addressing intergenerational barriers to school readiness and workforce readiness with high-quality preschool, intensified workforce training and targeted education,”¹³ the state can take crucial steps forward in ensuring Connecticut’s young children and struggling families have a brighter future.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

¹ See Raised Bill No. 340 “An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan,” Connecticut General Assembly (March 2014), available at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/TOB/s/pdf/2014SB-00340-R00-SB.pdf>.

² Joan Lombardi, Anne Mosle, Nisha Patel, Rachel Schumacher, and Jennifer Stedron “Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together,” Ascend: The Aspen Institute, (January 2014), available at: http://s.bsd.net/ascend/default/page/file/d3336cff8a154af047_07m6bttk2.pdf.

³ Susan H. Landry, “Effective Early Childhood Programs” The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (2005), available at: <http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/library/publications/documents/Effective-Early-Childhood-Programs.pdf>.

⁴ 211 Child Care. ‘Fee Analysis of Child Care Facilities in Connecticut: July 16, 2013,” available at: <http://www.211childcare.org/professionals/FeeCT.asp>.

⁵ “Selected Annual Federal Poverty and State Median Income Guidelines,” Connecticut Department of Social Services, (July 2013), available at: <http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/PDFs/PovSMI.pdf>.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table B13014: Women 15 to 50 Years Who Had a Birth in the Past 12 Months by Marital Status and Educational Attainment

⁷ Connecticut Voices for Children and Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) data in 2012. For more, see Edie Joseph and Orlando Rodriguez, “The State of Working Connecticut 2013: Young People in the Workforce,” Connecticut Voices for Children, (August 2013), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ13sowctfull.pdf>.

⁸ Tom Hertz, "Understanding Mobility in America," Center for American Progress, (April 2006), available at: http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/hertz_mobility_analysis.pdf.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table B23008: Age of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies by Living Arrangements by Employment Status of Parents.

¹⁰ See Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D., Tamara Kramer, J.D., and Edie Joseph, "Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2013), Connecticut Voices for Children, (January 2014), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/ece13progressreport.pdf>.

¹¹ Joan Lombardi, Anne Mosle, Nisha Patel, Rachel Schumacher, and Jennifer Stedron "Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together," Ascend: The Aspen Institute, (January 2014), available at: http://s.bsd.net/ascend/default/page/file/d3336cff8a154af047_07m6bttk2.pdf.

¹² For more, see All Our Kin "The Economic Impact of the All Our Kin Family Child Care Tool Kit Licensing Program," available at: <http://www.allourkin.org/sites/default/files/Exec%20Summary-color1.pdf>. Also see Even Start, <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Adult/federal/evenstartbro.pdf>.

¹³ See Raised Bill No. 340 "An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan," Connecticut General Assembly (March 2014), available at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/TOB/s/pdf/2014SB-00340-R00-SB.pdf>.