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**March 3, 2014**

**TESTIMONY REGARDING S.B. 25: An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood**

**Submitted to: The Committee on Education**
**By: Judith Meyers, Ph.D. President and CEO, Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI) and the Children's Fund of Connecticut**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee, I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the board and staff of the Children's Fund of Connecticut, a public charitable foundation, and its subsidiary, the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). Our mission is to promote primary and preventive health and mental health care for all children in Connecticut, with a particular focus on the underserved. Our Board Members include key state leaders in health care and members of the academic, education and business community who are committed to improving developmental outcomes for children in Connecticut.

Integrating early childhood systems is the best way to ensure optimal healthy child development and readiness for school success. We are strongly committed to promoting a fully integrated system for young children that coordinates early care and education with a comprehensive healthcare network. This commitment is reflected in many of our publications and our funding priorities. Given that, we fully endorse the creation in law of the Office Early Childhood (OEC). OEC was created last year by Executive Order, which is not sufficient to assure its long-term sustainability, rights, and obligations consistent with other state agencies.

The OEC, for the first time, combines the majority of key early care and education programs and services. The process of bringing these programs under one umbrella is underway and needs to continue over the next year. Locating the majority of programs that serve young children in one agency and under one director reduces fragmentation and results in greater accountability and provides the authority to make changes to achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

There are segments of the legislation that are of particular interest to us that we would like to applaud, given our focus on children's health:

- Data System and Information Gathering: SB 25 calls for an early childhood information system that will incorporate indicators of health, safety and school readiness of all children and will encourage sharing of information across systems. The requirement to submit information on primary care provider, health insurance coverage, health screens and immunizations will help gather population level information to inform planning and evaluation for child health care systems and interventions. Connecticut already has the Early Childhood Health Assessment Records required for entry into licensed early education programs. CHDI is working with communities to improve the use of this form and demonstrate how this rich source of data can be used at the individual and community levels. Our hope is to see this information added into the new ECIS and

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included in children's report cards as part of the early childhood accountability plan called for by SB 25.

- Public private partnerships. The Children's Fund of Connecticut is a member of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative that brings together the resources and wisdom of a dozen funders to leverage their investments in pursuit of their joint mission. This Collaborative was formed in 2011 to work toward the creation of an Office of Early Childhood and now seeks to bring the collective voice and resources of philanthropy to build and sustain a comprehensive early childhood system that works for all children, families, communities and the workforce in Connecticut. We are pleased to see that the new SB 25 designates one seat for a representative of the philanthropic community as part of the Early Childhood Cabinet.

- Health and safety standards in both licensed and unlicensed child care. The Children's Fund of Connecticut through CHDI has worked with a Yale research team to document problems in compliance with health and safety standards in licensed child care facilities. The results of this 2009 study led to reforms in the system and further recommendations to increase the frequency of licensing visits and improvements in the quality and training of the licensing staff. We applaud the continued attention to this matter.

While we applaud this important legislation, I do wish to note one concern:

The words 'child development' were excised from Section 3 in regard to 'a coordinated system of early care and education (~~and child development~~), and it is not clear why those words were removed. The intent of the legislation is to address the full range of health, safety and learning needs from birth to eight. Inclusion of the words "child development" clearly reflects this intent, and I hope that the deletion will in no way limit the purview of the OEC's responsibilities across all key developmental domains.

In closing, I urge passage of this bill. CHDI and the Children's Fund of Connecticut are committed to bringing our resources and expertise to help ensure the Office of Early Childhood is successful in improving services and supports for young children in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.