



**Testimony of Emilie Montgomery**  
**Executive Director of Early Care and Education, Community Renewal Team**  
**Submitted to the Education Committee, March 3, 2014**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Early Care and Education bills before you. I am Emilie Montgomery, Executive Director of Early Care and Education for the Community Renewal Team, where we provide quality child care and preschool to more than 1,400 children in eight municipalities. These children and their families benefit from CRT's state- and federally-funded Head Start, as well as state-funded School Readiness, infant and toddler care.

I have worked in many states around the US, and I applaud the tremendous efforts that Connecticut is making to close the achievement gap, and give quality early education to the broadest-possible number of children, regardless of their address or their family's income.

As part of the sweeping state-level restructuring of early childhood programs, I have had the privilege of participating in the Early Childhood Education Cabinet's Quality Rating and Improvement System Work Group (QRIS), which will truly revolutionize the way that early care programs are held accountable, and ways that parents can access information about those programs.

CRT whole-heartedly supports the new Office of Early Childhood, and the consolidation of standards, regulations and oversight into one integrated and rational system. Ironically, just as the state's attention is focusing on the importance of preschool, there is an issue that is having an extremely negative impact. Enrollment in both School Readiness and Head Start classrooms is declining in some regions, to the point where slots may need to be reallocated and some classrooms may be closed entirely. This is the unintended consequence of an expansion of preschool services, in a sector that is regulated differently from the traditional preschool programs.

A number of magnet schools are now offering pre-k programs. While increasing the choices offered to parents of four-year-olds, the magnet programs are not held to the same standards as public and private preschool programs which educate the same population: Magnet schools do not have to be licensed by the Department of Public Health; they do not have to be



accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); and it appears that they will not be subject to the oversight of the QRIS system.

Additionally, the magnet schools are not currently charging fees for their pre-k programs – and the State Department of Education seems resistant to implementing a sliding-scale payment plan in the 2014-15 school year.

Yet School Readiness programs are required to impose fees on parents: SB 25, Sec. 30. Section 17b-749d states that “Each licensed child day care provider receiving funding directly from the Office of Early Childhood shall adopt a sliding fee scale based on family income.” [Emphasis added.] CRT and our peers in the School Readiness field are licensed, and we will receive funds from the OEC. Therefore we are required to collect fees – while the magnet schools are not.

One of the most serious consequences of this imbalance could be the permanent loss of federal dollars and capacity. The US Dept of Health and Human Services (HHS) is examining the under-enrollment in Head Start programs, and may take the funding for these slots out of Connecticut permanently. As long as they are free, many parents are choosing to place their preschool children into magnet schools – leaving the Head Start programs under-utilized. But we strongly believe that, once tuition is imposed, many of these income-qualified families will again seek out the Head Start programs. It will be devastating if Head Start has been forced to reduce capacity and return funding to Washington, leaving these families on waiting lists – or missing out on preschool programming entirely.

We applaud the legislature’s efforts to address the current imbalance. Until this situation is resolved, however, we must protect the community’s early childhood infrastructure, which has been built up over time. To that end, CRT and others in the School Readiness community respectfully request the opportunity to invest unexpended per-child funding into quality enhancement, such as academic and professional development for staff and improved programming for children. Such supplemental quality enhancement can have long term benefits for Connecticut’s children, by improving outcomes and preserving capacity.

Finally, we commend the Governor’s Budget for the proposed 3% raise in the rates paid for School Readiness and Care4Kids. While costs have risen sharply, funding has been stagnant since 2006 (School Readiness) and 2001 (Care4Kids) respectively. Full-day full-year programming is vital for working parents, and it provides the best-possible start for children to enter kindergarten with the academic and social skills that they need.



Again, we endorse the new Office of Early Childhood. By bringing an array of disparate programming under one roof, this office will ensure that early care providers are working together to assess and meet the needs of our children, while operating in a fiscally prudent manner.

Thank you for your time and attention.

**Community Renewal Team, Inc.**

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