



Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Chief Executive Officer for ConnCAN

Education Committee – Monday, March 3, 2014

Good evening Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on two bills this evening regarding establishing the Office of Early Childhood ([SB25](#)) and expanding early childhood education ([SB26](#)).

My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN), which is a statewide advocacy organization focused on ensuring all kids get the high-quality education they deserve.

I strongly believe that all kids in Connecticut deserve the opportunity to attend a high-quality school, no matter where he or she lives, and that we must start providing our kids with a great education early.

But unfortunately, that's not happening in Connecticut today.

Today, more than 4,000 three- and four-year-olds in Connecticut do not have access to preschool.¹ As a result, our kids are not getting the start they need to succeed. Right now, only one out of three African-American, Hispanic, or low-income 3rd graders in Connecticut are reading at grade level.² And the research is clear that if a student is not reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade, they are four times more likely not to graduate high school on time.³

That's unacceptable. We can—and must—improve education for our children and our state have a brighter economic future. And doing so starts with improving access to quality early childhood education. Two measures before you today – codifying the Office of Early Childhood and enacting policies that help expand pre-K programs – will help do just that: improve outcomes for kids early so they're prepared for future success.

Research shows that on average, children who have access to preschool programs gain about one-third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and math skills.⁴ In some cases, preschool programs have enhanced reading skills of kids between a half and a full year of additional learning in reading and math,⁵ serving as proof that we can get more of our kids reading at the appropriate grade level if we start early.

¹ Office of Early Childhood. "Connecticut's Proposal for Universal Access to Pre-Kindergarten." 2014. Hyperlink: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?Q=540158&A=4547>.

² Connecticut State Department of Education. "Connecticut Mastery Tests." 2013. Hyperlink: <http://solutions1.emetric.net/CMTPublic/Index.aspx>.

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation." By Donald J. Hernandez. Hyperlink: <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Other/DoubleJeopardyHowThirdGradeReadingSkillsandPoverty/DoubleJeopardyReport030812forweb.pdf>.

⁴ Society for Research in Child Development. "Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education." Hyperlink: http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf.

⁵ Society for Research in Child Development. "Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education." Hyperlink: http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf.

We have a choice: we can pay for a high-quality preschool, or we can pay a much higher price later. For example, the rate of incarceration from felony convictions is one-third less among low-income children who have received access to a preschool experience.⁶ Research shows that for every dollar spent on preschool programs, the state can save anywhere from \$3.00 to \$7.00.⁷ Expanding preschool education is a smart economic investment for our kids and for our state.

As we expand preschool options, we need the Office of Early Childhood to consolidate efforts that have been scattered across agencies to better serve kids. The new office must ensure a strong governmental infrastructure to effectively align state resources and supports, improve family outreach and information, and ensure quality of programs that will prepare more youngsters for kindergarten and beyond.

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee – I urge you to support the expansion of early childhood programs and to codify the Office of Early Childhood. These efforts will help ensure that more kids across our state, particularly kids who need it most, receive the strong start they need to succeed later in life. They will also help make certain Connecticut remains a place where people want to live and work, companies want to invest and hire, and where our children thrive.

Thank you.

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⁶ Society for Research in Child Development. “Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education.” Hyperlink: http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf.

⁷ Society for Research in Child Development. “Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education.” Hyperlink: http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf.