



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Merrill Gay
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Before the Education Committee
March 3, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee,

I am Merrill Gay, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth through age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 25, An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, and Senate Bill 26, An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education.

SB 25 – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance strongly supports Senate Bill 25 which would put into statute the Office of Early Childhood established by Executive Order last year. The vision for an Office of Early Childhood began with this Committee over three years ago with the bill that became PA 11-181, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Child Development. We applaud the legislature for this vision, and urge you to finish the job by passing SB 25.

A designated Office of Early Childhood focuses early childhood efforts in one place, giving it the attention it deserves, and requires. A mounting body of research tells us that the early years of a child's life are critical to their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. It is essential that the state's early childhood programs are delivered with intentionality, coordinated to maximize effectiveness, and monitored to improve quality. Until last summer, services for young children were spread over at least five different state agencies and in none of those, was early childhood seen as key to the mission of the agency. With creation of the Office of Early Childhood last summer, we've begun to bring those various services together. As more of those services get moved to the Office over the next year including the Care4Kids subsidy, childcare licensing and the home visiting programs, Connecticut will be able to get all of the early childhood programs to work together and start to realize the collective impact that they could achieve when run as a coordinated system.

SB 25 will allow improvements to be made. The Office of Early Childhood is not just about moving programs from one place to another. SB 25 will put the Office into statute allowing it the authority not only to control the funding of early childhood programs but to make the changes necessary to improve coordination and synergy between programs and collect data allowing more informed funding and policy decisions.

Grandfathering of qualified staff. As you know the school readiness law requires that by 2015 half of the teachers in the state funded programs must have a BA and by 2020 every state funded classroom will have to have a teacher with a BA in Early Childhood or related field. A small,

but essential component of SB 25 grandfathers in existing teachers with a BA in a concentration other than Early Childhood so that they don't have to get another BA to keep the job they've been doing perfectly well up until now. This language is very important for teachers and programs, I urge your support of the grandfathering section and ask that you consider extending it to include other staff with BA's as well.

SB 26 –An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance also urges you to support SB 26. This bill does two key things:

It updates the law that created the School Readiness Program:

- by making it possible for more children in the Alliance and Competitive school districts to attend preschool
- by making it easier to increase the per child reimbursement rates paid to preschool providers, and
- by requiring the Office of Early Childhood to develop a plan for universal access to preschool

SB 26 also moves childcare licensing from the Department of Health to the Office of Early Childhood. This is very important because licensing is the bottom rung of the quality ladder that that we want all early childhood programs to start climbing.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you and I am happy to answer any questions.