

**Testimony Supporting
S.B. 25: An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood and
S.B. 26 An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education**

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Education Committee

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

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, an independent, 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 strongly supports S.B. 25: An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, as well as S.B. 26: An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education.

The Office of Early Childhood lays the foundation for an early care and education system that is capable of meeting the needs of all young children and families effectively, efficiently, and empathetically. We have long advocated for the creation of a separate department to better consolidate and coordinate early childhood services. Currently, the Office of Early Childhood exists only under Executive Order.¹ The Office must be codified in legislation to ensure longevity and maximum effectiveness.

National research shows that fragmented early care and education (ECE) delivery systems “limit effectiveness in delivering a seamless continuum of services to children and families, who may frequently utilize services across these siloed systems, experiencing cumbersome and duplicative processes, varied eligibility and enrollment requirements, and undue inconvenience.”² The Office of Early Childhood draws on the strengths of a separate department – independence, autonomy, and consolidation of many programs under one roof – while benefiting from significant cost savings through administrative support from the State Department of Education.

We also believe that the Office of Early Childhood successfully addresses the **5 key elements of successful early care and education systems as identified by the BUILD Initiative**, a national research-based think tank and consulting organization that helps to develop state- and federal-level early care and education systems. **The new system outlined in S.B. 25 recognizes that:**

1. A comprehensive early childhood system includes early learning, health, mental health, nutrition, family support, and early intervention;³
2. Early childhood governance structures that control federal and state funds and how they are spent are more successful than those structures that do not have this control;⁴
3. Data are crucial to the effectiveness, transparency, and successful outcomes of an early childhood system.⁵
4. Public-private partnership and local-level system building efforts are beneficial to system stability.⁶
5. Legislation to develop a comprehensive, coordinated governance system is the best way to form such a system.⁷

The Office of Early Childhood unites key programs affecting children birth to five, bringing together under one roof not only the major early care and education programs (including Care4Kids, School Readiness, Head Start, and State-Funded Centers), but also quality improvement services, licensing home visitation and family support programs, special education early intervention services, and workforce development initiatives.⁸ This broad consolidation reflects a critical understanding of the need to consider not only educational needs of young children, but also health, developmental, and family supports. By drawing on existing staff from these departments, the Office will benefit from tremendous expertise, while also having the ability to better coordinate between programs, improve efficiency, and reduce redundancy and confusion.

S.B. 25 is the culmination of tremendous work on the part of many stakeholders and partners. Governor Malloy's support for early childhood was invaluable, including creation of the Office of Early Childhood by Executive Order in June 2013.⁹ Getting to that stage would not have been possible without the support of this legislature, which passed PA 11-181, creating the planning process to develop an early childhood system blueprint. In addition, the Early Childhood Planning Team, led by Myra Jones-Taylor, put in many months of hard work collecting information, listening to stakeholders across the state, identifying the best practices of systems from other states, and crafting a thoughtful framework for Connecticut.

We believe that unifying early childhood services in one location will help create greater coordination and efficiency, reducing confusion for parents and providers and improving outcomes for children. The Office of Early Childhood will provide a strong platform from which the state of Connecticut will address the following **eight fundamental elements of successful early childhood systems**, which have been identified through extensive research and input from Connecticut's ECE community:¹⁰

1. **Uniform reporting requirements** for providers;
2. **Blended and braided state and federal funding sources** to allow early care and education providers to access a single funding stream;
3. **Fully funded services for children aged 0-8** based on evidence and research as to the real cost of high quality care;
4. A **quality rating and improvement system**;
5. Means to **develop our early childhood workforce** and improve this **workforce's compensation**;
6. **Coordinated data collection** that ensures that data are complete and transparent;
7. **Uniform standards for early learning** that are **developmentally appropriate**; and
8. Improved **outreach to and access for parents**.

In addition, **we support S.B. 26, An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education**, which takes key steps to implement the Governor's budget recommendations. The Governor's budget both increases the number of prekindergarten slots available for Connecticut's most vulnerable 3 and 4 year olds, and raises rates for early care and education subsidies.

In particular, **we support language in S.B. 26 which would allow for a rate increase in early care and education subsidies.** An increase in rates is crucial for maintaining and developing high-quality early education settings, and for providing more competitive wages to ensure the attraction and retention of high-quality early childhood educators. Though we applaud the Governor's proposed increase of 3%, this increase alone is insufficient to allow us to reach our goal of paying

early childhood educators a competitive wage that will help Connecticut’s early childhood educators develop, foster, and maintain the high-quality education our state needs. We believe the legislature should amend this language to legislatively establish a rate that would allow for the competitive wages required for quality.¹¹

S.B. 26 makes additional commitments to quality by enacting the Governor’s budget proposal to increase the frequency of child care licensing inspections. It also transfers authority of such inspection and investigation to the executive director of the Office of Early Childhood. Increasing frequency of inspections ensures consistent quality, and concentrating this authority in the new Office makes clear sense.

Finally, S.B. 26 requires that the executive director of the OEC develop a plan to provide school readiness spaces to all eligible children.¹² This plan is a critical element in creating a coordinated and more accessible early childhood system, and we applaud the legislation for acknowledging the Office’s capacity and vision.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

¹ See Executive Order No. 35, State of Connecticut, (June 24, 2013), available at: http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/EO_35_Early_Childhood.pdf.

² See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *BUILD* (November 2010) on pg. 11.

³ See Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins, “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences,” *The BUILD Initiative* (November 2010) on pg. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ Care4Kids, Child Care Center Licensing, Home Visitation Programs, and Special Education Prekindergarten Services have not yet moved to the Office of Early Childhood but are slated to move effective July 1, 2014.

⁹ See Executive Order No. 35, State of Connecticut, (June 24, 2013), available at: http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/EO_35_Early_Childhood.pdf.

¹⁰ These eight fundamental elements were determined through collaborative research and discussion between Connecticut Voices for Children, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). *For more information, see Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” Connecticut Voices for Children* (February 2011) on pg. 28-30 (available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/connecticut-early-care-and-education-progress-report-2010>).

¹¹ We calculate that to raise prekindergarten teacher salaries to \$42,500 (the average starting salary for elementary school teachers in Connecticut), the per child rate would need to be increased by \$1,850, creating a new full day slot rate of \$10,206. More information is available by request.

¹² See Governor’s Bill No. 26, Connecticut General Assembly, available at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/TOB/S/2014SB-00026-R00-SB.htm>.