



# EDUCATION CONNECTION

A Regional Educational Service Center

355 Goshen Road  
P.O. Box 909  
Litchfield, CT 06759-0909  
Phone: 860.567.0863  
Fax: 860.567.3381

345 Main Street  
Danbury, CT 06810  
Phone: 203.791.1904  
Fax: 203.778.8076

[www.educationconnection.org](http://www.educationconnection.org)

February 27, 2014

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

I am Juleen P. Flanigan, the Director of Early Childhood Services at EDUCATION CONNECTION, the regional education service center serving western CT. I am writing this testimony in support of Senate Bill #25, An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood. I strongly support the establishment of the CT Office of Early Childhood that will ensure the continuity and coordination of established services that meet the needs of young children and their families.

CT's support systems for young children and families has evolved over decades one by one as different needs emerged or funding became available through federal or state resources. This development over time has resulted in a service system that spans 7 state agencies with very little formal inter-relatedness resulting in a fragmented and often ineffective and inefficient system. Those of us working with families and young children are acutely aware of this issue as we attempt to support parents' ability to navigate these systems. It is time for us to correct this system and support a coordinated approach.

Some may question – why now? We as a state and a nation have witnessed over the past few decades the release of compelling research that testifies to the fact that 80% of a child's brain is developed by the age of 5. This development is supported by multiple factors including nurturing, attachment, nutrition, and safety. We have also learned that the brain is enriched through exposure to language and words, music, books, art and tactile experiences. This research has stunned some and validated for others the importance of the earliest years of a child's life and the important role of the parents, teachers and the caregivers of young children. We are revising our curricula, providing expanded support and training to new parents, implementing new methods of support to teachers and investing in the community collaborative model that highlights the voices of parents.

Likewise, it is time to revisit the design of our state systems to refocus priorities, universalize principles that apply to all services and understand that families approach the service system as individuals trying to find the most appropriate supports for their situation. Providers experience difficulty with this task themselves.

We have already seen great strides over this past year with the Office of Early Childhood- state employees from multiple state agencies are talking together and problem solving to align systems to be more effective. We need to continue this – it makes so much sense.

One of the other challenges that we are faced with is the exciting growth in early childhood services and the need for qualified teachers. In order to ensure quality, teachers are being held to new standards. This is important and needed, but not at the expense of losing excellent teachers who may be required to return to school for an additional degree or certification. There is a "grandfather" provision in Senate Bill 25 which is essential to provide for an enduring workforce.

All teachers in NAEYC accredited programs are required to have ongoing professional development and will continue to do so. Please support this grandfather language as the colleges prepare future teachers and the currently qualified teachers continue with their good work and continuous improvement process.

Thank you.

Juleen P. Flanigan

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Juleen P. Flanigan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Director, Early Childhood Services