

Testimony of Gail Nolan

Co-chair Early Childhood Alliance, representing The Alliance for Bloomfield's Children

Director, Laurel Family Resource Center and Bloomfield School Readiness

Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of SB 25 An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood. I am Gail Nolan, Director of the Laurel Family Resource Center and Bloomfield School Readiness. I am also the current Co-chair of The Early Childhood Alliance. I live and work in Bloomfield with my husband and 3 children.

I have been involved in Early Childhood for many years and have seen it from many vantage points. I have a B.A. In Psychology and a MSW in Social work and have held jobs working with children for many years. I was a home childcare provider, worked in an inpatient mental health unit, in several group homes and reunification programs, worked in child care centers, family resource centers, done home visiting, playgroups, case management, assessments, referrals, observations and program evaluations, written grants and filed reports.

In most all of these cases, the procedures, requirements and paperwork have been different. Agencies and programs are at the mercy of their funders to follow procedures to meet requirements that make sense to them without regard to the time it takes to learn, document and record all of the information that separate agencies need. The direct service workers end up filing many different forms containing similar information. This takes away precious time from what is most important, which is helping families.

Families face similar troubles when applying for aid from programs. It is very hard for families to navigate the systems they are faced with to get help. That's why in 2011 the legislature passed PA 11-181 to develop a plan that would bring together all the various state programs impacting families with young children and why last summer Governor Malloy created the Office of Early Childhood by executive order. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 25 to formalize the Office of Early Childhood in law.

Establishing the Office in law will make it clear that you want it to be permanent and that you want it to continue with the process of bringing together the various programs and funding streams that support early childhood. It will make it clear that you value the effort to reduce duplicative paperwork and contradictory requirements in order to serve families more efficiently. With the Office firmly established in law they get on with the business of building a unified system to support early childhood rather than the isolated programs that we've had in the past. When programs are together, it also allows them to communicate more effectively and efficiently with each other. This would help and benefit families. Instead of parents having to hunt and seek programs one at a time, they could access the "system" at any point and then be in contact with others services for which they are eligible.

In conclusion, please support SB 25 and move it through the process as quickly as possible so that we don't repeat what happened last year.

Thank you for your consideration,

Gail Nolan