

SB- 424

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 424

DCF and Head Start began a Partnership Initiative in the Northwest part of the state in 1999 – today we have formalized partnerships in every community that provide a very efficient and effective system of child protection, and appropriate educational and developmental services with aligned policies and practices.

We now have 15 years of experience collaborating to support foster families and the children in their care - developing comprehensive, individualized service plans that help assure the optimal outcomes for these children who by the nature of their circumstances have exceptional challenges in their young lives to surmount if they are to be successful in the public school setting and eventual productive members of society.

This Bill assures that when appropriate, all 3 – 5 year old children in Foster Care would receive services in a high quality preschool such as Head Start. DCF has the power and leverage to obtain medical and behavioral health services the child might need while in a safe home environment. The quality preschool provides; also within a safe, healthy environment, learning experiences in the area of social/emotional, physical, nutritional, and academic development so that as a child transitions from Foster Care back into their home of origin or an adoptive home they have the age appropriate tools and skills they need be successful. We have well trained staff that employs scientifically based, vetted curricula in all of these developmental areas. With supports provided through the State Department of Education such as the LINK and ENHANCEMENT grants we are able

individualize most of our learning experiences resulting in more than 90% of our children entering kindergarten behaviorally, physically and academically ready.

Let me close with Little Suzie's example of what we don't want to see happen.

Two years ago we got a call from the Torrington DCF office that they had a 3 year old in placement and could we enroll her? Sure! We meet with the foster mom, enrolled the child and were ready to go when mom decided to send Suzie to a nursery school a mile down the road rather than drive the 10 miles to our center.

We all understand that – unfortunately, the nursery school was lovely, but not high quality. When I saw mom, now adoptive mom (yea!) this past November she said, “How I wish I had sent Suzie to Head Start, she is not ready for

kindergarten and is really struggling.” You are the Education Committee, you

know the stakes are high – please afford these unfortunate children the

opportunity to learn and unfold in the best preschool environments this state has to offer. Thank you.