

Testimony
Submitted to the Education Committee

March 12, 2014

S.B. No. 424 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Bye, Representative McCrory, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Deborah Richards and I serve as the Director of Student Services of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). I am here testifying on behalf of our Executive Director, Dr. Bruce Douglas. CREC provides extensive educational support services throughout the state of Connecticut and operates six highly accomplished and specialized programs for students with disabilities and 19 successful interdistrict magnet schools in the greater Hartford area. We serve approximately 1,000 preschool children of which 10% are identified with disabilities.

I am testifying today on **Senate Bill 424**, An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families.

Senate Bill 424 seeks to ensure that high quality preschool education is provided to the most vulnerable young children in our state, those children ages 3-5 who have been abused or neglected and are committed to the Department of Children and Families.

Extensive research shows that high-quality preschool is the single most important educational investment for children of all backgrounds. The first few years of life are critical for a child's cognitive and social emotional development. Evaluations of well-run prekindergarten programs have demonstrated that children enrolled in high-quality early learning experiences are less likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, need special education, and become incarcerated than children who do not have such opportunities. Preschool education is particularly critical for abused and neglected children due to the significant impact trauma has on their social emotional and intellectual development.

CREC has extensive experience providing services for children and youth who have experienced trauma. We cannot emphasize enough how critical a system of comprehensive intervention and support is for an abused or neglected child and their family or guardian. It is difficult to comprehend that the state agency charged with the care of this most vulnerable population does not have access to funds for this basic and universal need for these children. We know on both a cognitive and emotional level, the right thing to do is to ensure access to high-quality services for the most at-risk population of young children in our state.

We urge you to pass **Senate Bill 424** to enhance our collective commitment to do what is right for these children and to positively impact their long term outcomes. These children need every opportunity we can provide.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our endorsement of this legislation and your commitment to the children and youth in our state.