

**Testimony: Yamuna Menon, Manager of Policy and Legal Affairs for ConnCAN**  
*Education Committee – Wednesday, March 12, 2014*

Good day Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on **SB 424, An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families.**

My name is Yamuna Menon and I am the Manager of Policy and Legal Affairs for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN), which is a statewide advocacy organization focused on ensuring all kids get the high-quality education they deserve.

We strongly believe that all kids in Connecticut deserve the opportunity to attend a high-quality school, regardless of where he or she lives, and that we must start providing our kids with a great education early. Children in the DCF system are no exception, and deserve to have equal opportunity to receive a world-class education.

But unfortunately, that's not happening in Connecticut today.

Today, more than 4,000 three- and four-year-olds in Connecticut, including hundreds of children under the state's care, do not have access to preschool.<sup>1</sup> As a result, our kids are not getting the start they need to succeed. The research is clear that if a student is not reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade, they are four times more likely not to graduate high school on time.<sup>2</sup>

That's unacceptable. We can—and must—improve education for our children and our state have a brighter economic future. And doing so starts with improving access to quality preschool education, but that must include all children, including those children who have been abused or neglected and are in the custody of the state.

Research shows that on average, children who have access to preschool programs gain about one-third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and math skills.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, preschool programs have enhanced reading skills of kids between a half and a full year of additional learning in reading and math,<sup>4</sup> serving as proof that we can get more of our kids reading at the appropriate grade level, if we start early.

Children in the DCF system have only the state to serve as an advocate for their education. It is critical that we provide these, and all students, access to a high-quality preschool.

We have a choice: we can pay for a high-quality preschool, or we can pay a much higher price later. For example, the rate of incarceration from felony convictions is one-third less among low-income children

---

<sup>1</sup> Office of Early Childhood. "Connecticut's Proposal for Universal Access to Pre-Kindergarten." 2014. Hyperlink: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?Q=540158&A=4547>

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation." By Donald J. Hernandez. Hyperlink: <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Other/DoubleJeopardyHowThirdGradeReadingSkillsandPoverty/DoubleJeopardyReport030812forweb.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Society for Research in Child Development. "Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education." Hyperlink: [http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb\\_2013\\_10\\_16\\_investing\\_in\\_children.pdf](http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

who have received access to a preschool experience.<sup>5</sup> Research shows that for every dollar spent on preschool programs, the state can save anywhere from \$3.00 to \$7.00.<sup>6</sup> Expanding preschool education is a smart economic investment for our kids and for our state.

I urge you to support the expansion of early childhood programs to all children, including those for whom the state is the legal guardian through DCF. These efforts will help ensure that more kids across our state, particularly kids who need it most, receive the strong start they need to succeed later in life. They will also help make certain Connecticut remains a place where people want to live and work, companies want to invest and hire, and where *all* of our children can thrive.

Thank you.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*