

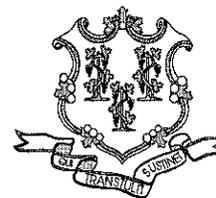


STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony

Education Committee

March 12, 2014



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

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) offers the following comments regarding S.B. No. 424, An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families. This bill requires DCF to enroll each preschool-aged child, who is committed to DCF and in out-of-home care, in an eligible pre-school program as defined by the bill.

The Department concurs that getting all pre-school children under our care into a quality pre-school program is a very worthy goal. Currently, DCF has 473 children aged 3 - 5 in out-of-home care. Another 188 will turn three by December 31, 2014.

For the past eleven years, the Department has participated in the DCF-Head Start Partnership. The purpose of this collaborative is to ensure access to Early Head Start/Head Start programs for DCF children. DCF-involved children have "priority access" to these programs but we frequently come up against capacity and geographic barriers.

This legislation raises a number of issues which would need to be addressed, including:

- Pre-school program capacity may be an issue, particularly seats at high quality programs in the communities where DCF's pre-school children reside in the greatest numbers. If so, will the number of quality pre-school seats in communities with the greatest need be increased? Or will DCF kids be afforded some sort of "preference" for admission?
- What will it cost to provide pre-school programming for all children not currently enrolled? Will these resources be provided to the DCF budget?
- What about transportation? Will foster parents be responsible for transporting the children back and forth? What fiscal impact will this have?
- The July 1, 2014 effective date is unrealistic. Questions about need and capacity by community would need to be answered; resources to pay for the programming would need to be secured; and staff in each DCF Area or Region would need to be deployed to match children with slots, in some cases create slots, sign children up for services, arrange transportation, etc. DCF would also need to develop a data system to allow us to track enrollment for each child.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's position on this legislation. We are available to discuss these issues in greater detail with Committee members and staff.