State of Connecticut

Office of Early Childhood

Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee
H.B. 5323 – An Act Concerning the Child Poverty and Prevention Council
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The Office of Early Childhood submits testimony in support of H.B. 5323 – An Act Concerning the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. This bill would add the executive director of the Office of Early Childhood as a member of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. We support this change in membership to the Council and I look forward to participate as an active member in the critical work that lies ahead to reduce child poverty in Connecticut.

The Office of Early Childhood, established by Governor Dannel Malloy through Executive Order #35 on June 24, 2013, brings together early childhood programs spread across four state agencies into one agency. A separate bill introduced this session in the Education Committee would codify the Office of Early Childhood and lay out in detail the charge of the Office to ensure that low-income young children are ready for school and lifelong success.

The centralized accountability of the Office allows for a concerted focus on children from birth to age five through unified services, policy, budget, data, and outcome measurement. This governance structure allows Connecticut to implement its bold early childhood reform by accomplishing the following:

1. Improved outcomes for young children through better access and unified quality
2. Streamlined information for parents
3. Coordination across programs and services
4. Alignment of efforts to promote all aspects of child development
5. Efficiencies to avoid duplication and provide better value
6. Accountability for results and the quality and equitable distribution of programs

The early childhood services that have been transferred or will transfer into the OEC encompass:

- Workforce development
- Program quality and improvement
- Standards curriculum and assessment
- State grants and subsidies for early care and education, state-funded Head Start
- Child Care Development Funds
- Child care licensing
- Home visiting

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- Family engagement
- Head Start collaboration
- Early childhood special education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619)

It is appropriate that the Office of Early Childhood has a seat on the Child Poverty and Prevention Council, given the agency's focus on improving socio-emotional and learning outcomes for low-income young children with high needs. The data shows that Connecticut has much work to do to reduce child poverty rates.

The United States Census Bureau estimates that the birth to age five population in Connecticut is 235,602. We estimate that some 79,000, or 34 percent, of the children in this age group live in low-income households. This estimate is based upon the number of children eligible for and participating in the state's Medicaid/CHIP program, Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth (HUSKY). The figure was validated by examining the reported number of children from birth to age five who are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch, both of which are indices for poverty. The state also has a significant number of special populations of children with high needs, including roughly 9,142 children with disabilities or development delays and 13,665 who are English Language Learners. Factoring in the overlap between low-income and special populations, we conservatively estimate that there are 80,000 children with high needs in the state.

As the research shows, it is critical to invest in the earliest years of a child's life, particularly for low-income children with high needs. Investing early in the care, education, and support of young children has powerful impacts far into the future: it prepares a young child for early learning and school success, contributes to a well prepared workforce, reduces criminal justice costs, and strengthens the fabric of families and communities.

The Office of Early Childhood also supports consolidating two reports currently required by statute into one report. Current law requires that the Governor include a prevention report within the Governor's biennial budget. The production of this report requires significant state resources and is duplicative of similar reporting efforts performed by the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. In the state's continued effort to streamline government, promote efficiencies, and eliminate redundancy, this proposal seeks to consolidate the requirements of the Governor's prevention report into the annual report produced by the Child Poverty and Prevention Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 5323.