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Testimony in support of H.B. 5823: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A STATE-WIDE COORDINATED TWO-GENERATIONAL MODEL.

Good Afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and Members of the Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here today in strong support of HB 5823: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A STATE-WIDE COORDINATED TWO- GENERATIONAL MODEL.

The stated intent of this bill is to foster intergenerational success for low income families. For many low- income families, generational poverty is hard to escape. There is compelling data that indicates that a child born into poverty is likely to remain in poverty. We know that early experiences are essential for a strong developmental growth. Children don't live outside the context of their family. Research tells us that a mother's level of educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of children's success.¹ Unfortunately for many of the most-in-need parents, lack of education and illiteracy obstruct their personal and economic success, limit the literacy skills of their children, provide an atmosphere of family stress and contribute to the cycle of poverty. **As it stands now there is no coordinated strategy available for families—parents and children together-- to access a path to family economic success.**

We are encouraged that HB 5327 specifically addresses the development and implementation of coordinated two-Generation model programs that promote long-term economic success for families; both parents and children together.

The bill includes the initial mechanisms to develop a coordinated and intensive family program. It includes strong emphasis on several important components of a model:

- Continued education and workforce training for parents, giving parents the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for higher paying job opportunities
- Program linkages to between parent and child activities
- The availability of the supports that families need to reduce barriers to success.
- The inclusion of a strong system of data collection and evaluation; ensuring programs are consistent in focus and have strong results for both parents and children.

¹ (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2012),(Hernandez, 2014)
A Century of Strengthening Children, Families, and Communities

Although we strongly support these elements, we respectfully suggest several important elements that should also be considered for inclusion in this bill and the accompanying planning process:

- A more defined focus on quality early care and education, in particular high quality infant/ toddler care. These first years are crucial in the life of both infant and parent. Having a focus on this population presents an extraordinary opportunity to have the greatest impact on both parent and child.
- Community coordination, using collaborations between existing services to provide the basis for community projects/partnerships.
- Developing public/ private partnerships, leveraging both state and national philanthropic dollars. Such partnerships could be used to develop a clear and cohesive framework, program development, a coordinated system for data collection and accountability, and technical assistance/professional development opportunities for communities and across agencies.
- Using the knowledge and talent of those state employees who have had experience in the oversight and evaluation of comprehensive and integrated family success model programs. An understanding of the nuances, best practices, challenges and solutions will move the process from conceptual to actualized. The Even Start program is one such program that offers a solid base of knowledge. Those familiar with this type of program coordination will be best able to navigate and lead the process of development.

Finally, we suggest that the development and implementation of this type of integrated and comprehensive model requires both horizontal strategies across a range of state agencies, and vertical strategies, across federal, state, and local government agencies, including all levels of education, as well as nonprofit service providers.

Horizontally, we need to make sure that our system of service is aligned and focused on the many needs of this population. For this to be intentional and inclusive effort, the Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services will need to align themselves with other state agencies. The Office of Early Childhood, the Department of Education (including adult education) and the Board of Regents, at a minimum, should be included as part of united and system-wide effort.

Vertically, we must make find ways to coordinate funding streams and manage policies wisely:

- Federal: Obtaining and utilizing all available federal funding and supports,
- State: Blending and braiding our existing state allocations across departments, finding avenues to allow policies to support community efforts, promoting a collaborative spirit toward common goals
- Local: Utilizing the rich existing programmatic resources in communities for a collaborative model, using additional funding to support missing pieces of a collaborative project not to support an entirely new program.

Nationally, Connecticut is one of a handful of states on the cutting edge of this work. As you may know, during the 2014 legislative session, the Commission on Children was charged with convening a Two- Generation workgroup to research and assess the merits of this approach.

CAHS has been part of this workgroup, and is in support of its recommendations, and will be working closely with the Commission to advance this work.

We have also been working with our national partners, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Working Poor Families Project, which have been researching and promoting ways in which communities can align existing programs in a collaborative model to provide a comprehensive approach to family success.

By focusing only on the children without consideration for the adults in their lives, or focusing only on adults without including the children, we are addressing half a solution towards the elimination of the achievement gap, generational poverty and racial and economic equity. We believe that a strong plan Two-Generation approach, if designed and implemented with focus, collaboration and a strong assessment and evaluation component, will provide a means to opportunity for many low – income parents and children in Connecticut.