



**Testimony of Stacylee Aylward
Education Coordinator, Community Renewal Team**

Human Services Committee, March 11, 2015

Senate Bill 1044, An Act Concerning The Recoupment Of State Costs Attributable To Low Wage Employers

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Stacylee Aylward and I am one of the Education Coordinators for the Community Renewal Team's Early Care and Education Program. I am here this afternoon to speak in favor of Senate Bill 1044, because it seems to provide a mechanism to fund educational improvements and professional advancement for those of us who nurture and educate our youngest children.

Thank you for inviting public comment on such an important topic. I know that you will be hearing from many people throughout the afternoon, all of us passionate about the field we have chosen: Early Care and Education. I'm fortunate to be working for one of the largest Head Start and School Readiness programs in the state, where 297 staff are educating more than 1,400 children – many of whom are at risk.

I want to tell you – I absolutely love my job as an Education Coordinator! After 14 years as a preschool classroom teacher, and with a bachelor degree in education , I now coach teachers, support parents, and find ways to help the preschoolers who need something extra. I come home every day absolutely exhausted, but very proud of what my team has accomplished for children and their families.

But I have to admit, there are times when I wonder about the wisdom of the career choices I have made. Like when my 17-year-old son comes home from his job as a roller-skating waiter at Sonic Burger, with more money from one shift than I have made in one day! How is that possible – that a car hop is making more in daily wages and tips than an educator who's designing curricula and activities for 14 classrooms in three locations totaling 212 children and their families.

When I came to CRT as a classroom teacher four years ago, I became involved as a Union Representative, and then sat on the contract negotiating team. It was at that point that it became very clear to me that the public grants for Head Start and other Early Care programs do not provide adequate funding to raise salaries to reflect the level of education and responsibility of the staff.

At CRT, the average hourly rate for a teacher is \$15.32 per hour. As of last month, 19 of those teachers had Associate's degrees. 22 had Bachelor's degrees. And seven teachers had obtained Master's degrees!

Family Service Workers, who help our parents set goals and find resources in the community, often find that at 14.60 an hour they earn less than the families they are supporting! One co-worker told me recently



that she feels kind of strange signing up other families for free turkeys and groceries, when her family needs this support themselves.

As you can imagine, it is very difficult to find and retain qualified staff when the pay is so low. And yet many people stay with CRT for a very long time ... deepening their skills, developing wonderful relationships with several generations of families, creating a cooperative team environment at their centers. But after a time, the inability to pay the bills may just become too much.

Very recently we lost a wonderful Head Teacher who had been with us for two decades. She went to work as a paraprofessional in a public school, where she could earn more on Day One than the \$16.86 she was making at CRT. Essentially, she took a demotion so that she could get a more reasonable wage for her family.

But today we should be focusing on more than just take-home pay. All of the early childhood staff in the entire country are being asked to obtain college degrees – something that was unusual years ago. For the most part, these employees go back to school ‘on their own dime,’ even if their local organization can provide a course or two for free. The cost of a college credit runs between \$125 and \$525 at our local two-year institutions – and most courses are three or four credits. So – just to keep their jobs – our early care staff may be spending more than \$1,500 each semester, to move toward a degree.

In closing, let me say that the people choose to work in the early care field regardless of the money. They love what they do and the impact they make on children and their families. But should this devotion to other people’s families come at the expense of their own? I ask you to consider that, as you bring this bill to a vote. Thank you very much for your time.

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