



**Date:** 3/11/15

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 1044  
An act to increase funding for early care and education**

My name is Tiffany Murasso. I am the Senior Director of Early Childhood and Family Center Programs at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford, which serves 337 low income children in some of CTs neediest communities through the Office of Early Childhood's School Readiness initiative. Catholic Charities has been a part of this initiative since it's inception in 1997 when the state recognized the potential of Early Childhood programs to help close the achievement gap.

Research shows that high-quality early childhood programs can help to buffer the negative experiences of poverty and close the achievement gap. The primary measures of quality are the education level of teachers and quality of the interactions between teachers and children. Our state has recognized the importance of teacher qualifications and has set the goal of bachelor's degree teachers in every classroom. By July 1, Connecticut will require half of the teachers in state subsidized preschool and early learning programs to have a bachelor's degree. The other half must have associate's degrees. By 2020, all classrooms are to have bachelor-degreed teachers.

While we support this goal and commend the Governor for his vision for Early Childhood there is a fundamental problem with the system as it stands. The reimbursement rate currently does not allow agencies like ours to pay experienced, trained and educated teachers a fair salary. The state must increase the rate it reimburses early childhood programs so that we can pay enough to attract and retain teachers who meet the degree requirements. Teachers with bachelor's degrees in my agency typically earn \$30,000 a year. This is what paraprofessionals with an associate's degree earn in a public school working 10 months out of the year. Bachelor's level teachers in Connecticut's public schools start at \$43,500. For Assistant teachers in our agency, the pay is even worse, many qualify for and rely on programs like SNAP, HUSKY and fuel assistance to help make ends meet.

The first 5 years of a child's life are the most critical for brain growth and development and this development sets the stage for all future learning and development. We must make informed decisions at the state level that ensure that our neediest children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We can pay for it now or pay for it later through grade retention, special education and the criminal justice system.