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Testimony in Support of SB 956
Christina Nelson, Early Childhood Policy Fellow, All Our Kin
Before the Committee on Children
March 3, 2015

Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. My name is Christina Nelson, and I am a Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. We are a nationally-recognized, Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains and supports family child care providers. I'm here today to testify in support of SB 956, AN ACT EXPANDING THE CARE 4 KIDS PROGRAM, and to urge the Committee to consider making additional legislative changes to the Care 4 Kids program in order to ensure that it is accessible to the families who need it most.

The high cost of child care represents a huge burden for families with young children. According to Child Care Aware of America, the average annual cost of full-time child care for an infant in Connecticut is $13,241 per year, or 43.3% of the income of the average single mother in Connecticut.[1] In these circumstances, Care 4 Kids is a lifeline for Connecticut's working families. At All Our Kin, we see firsthand how these subsidies allow children of low- and moderate-income parents to benefit from stable family child care arrangements that are key for their healthy academic, emotional, and mental development.

We at All Our Kin strongly support the proposed changes to the Care 4 Kids program. Including higher education within the definition of employment-related activities will incentivize parents to pursue continuing their education, and extending the redetermination period from 8 to 12 months has been widely recognized as a crucial step in making child care assistance programs more family-friendly by promoting a higher degree of continuity in a child's care. The recently-reauthorized national Child Care and Development Block Grant acknowledges these advantages of twelve-month redetermination. Furthermore, reduced redetermination frequency minimizes the costly administrative expenses that occur when parents cycle in and out of child care assistance programs for no reason.[2] SB 956 is thus an investment in Connecticut's efficiency, in its skilled workforce, in families, and in our youngest, most vulnerable children.

By encouraging information-sharing and collaboration across different government agencies and departments, SB 956 also represents a more two generational approach to the Care 4 Kids program. It is in line with the recommendations of Connecticut's Two Generational Policy Workgroup[3], which

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[1] Fraga, Lynette, and Michelle McCready. 2014. "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care." Arlington, VA: Child Care Aware of America. http://cca.worksmartsuite.com/UserEditFormFilling.aspx
[2] Adams, Gina, and Monica Rohacek. 2010. "Child Care Instability: Definitions, Context, and Policy Implications." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. http://www.urban.org/publications/412278.html.
[3] Zimmerman, Elaine. 2014. "A Two-Generational Approach: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive." Commission on Children. http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/two-gen/2015-02-03_report_FINAL.pdf

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suggested increased interdepartmental communication in order to streamline service provision and treat families as a unit. Because burdensome documentation requirements at the point of entry to Care 4 Kids are a barrier to many eligible families seeking to access benefits, and because many families are enrolled in multiple benefit programs simultaneously, increased information-sharing may help streamline the documentation process, eliminate redundancy, and reduce processing times for families in the system. Furthermore, we sincerely hope that this increased collaboration will engender the introduction of a method for parents to demonstrate presumptive eligibility for Care 4 Kids, by, for example, allowing parents who have already demonstrated their eligibility for another benefit program to be presumed eligible. This system would provide the immediate and necessary supports for parents seeking child care for employment and educational purposes.

Care 4 Kids is a critical and forward-thinking program, and All Our Kin strongly supports the effort to expand it and make it more accessible for families.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.