



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

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Testimony of Myra Jones-Taylor, Ph.D., Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood
Before the Committee on Children
S.B. 956 – An Act Expanding the Care 4 Kids Program
S.B. 1008 – An Act Establishing an Infant and Toddler Services Board
Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. I am Myra Jones-Taylor, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify before this committee concerning two bills:

- S.B. 956 – An Act Expanding the Care 4 Kids Program
- S.B. 1008 – An Act Establishing an Infant and Toddler Services Board

S.B. 956 would make three policy changes to the Care4Kids program.

The bill would allow attending a higher education institution to be an eligible activity to access a Care4Kids child care subsidy. Securing a higher education degree, indeed, provides greater opportunity for an individual to secure employment and move out of poverty. While this policy proposal is worthy, it would have significant budget implications. It is anticipated that a significant number of parents attending higher education would access Care4Kids. Since this is a capped program, Care4Kids funding would be spent much more quickly resulting in program closure before the end of the fiscal year. That means that parents who secure employment after the date the program is closed would not be able to secure the critically needed child care subsidy. For these factors, the OEC cannot support this policy change at this time.

The bill would also change redetermination of a household from 8 months to 12 months. The OEC fully supports changing from an 8-month to 12-month redetermination, which promotes continuity of care for the child. This policy shift is in alignment with the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorization that requires states to set redetermination at 12 months. The re-authorization prohibits states from terminating the child care subsidy due to loss of employment and requires states to continue assistance for at least three months to allow the parent to search for a job. In addition, states must take into account irregular fluctuation in hours and earnings for initial determination and redetermination.

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This section of S.B. 956, as written, would be out of compliance with the CCDBG requirements. For example, the current statute requires the Office of Early Childhood to conduct an analysis of overpayment of program benefits and if program overpayments increase as a result of having an eight-month redetermination, the Commissioner may change the redetermination period back to six months. This section does not comply with the new CCDBG requirements. The OEC is proposing legislation in the Education Committee that simply deletes the existing statute regarding redetermination. The OEC will establish administrative policy in compliance with the new CCDBG reauthorization. For this reason, we urge the Committee to delete the existing statutory language concerning redetermination.

Finally, the bill would require the Office of Early Childhood to collaborate with the Departments of Social Services, Developmental Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Children and Families, and Public Health, to implement an information sharing process that would enable the OEC to share information regarding recipients of Care4Kids child care subsidies with these state agencies. The bill language states that the intent of such information sharing is to identify whether these families are also receiving benefits or services from other state-sponsored programs. The OEC child-level data is protected under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). We would need to develop data sharing agreements with other state agencies so that data sharing of any personally-identifiable information will only occur within the requirements of FERPA.

S.B. 1008 would establish an Infant and Toddler Services Board that would be charged with creating a strategic plan to ensure the health and well-being of children ages birth through three. It is heartening that there has been so much discussion and attention paid to the importance of investing in a child's earliest years, birth to three. Brain and early childhood trauma research and findings demonstrate the critical need to provide needed supports to infants and toddlers to ensure they are healthy, thriving, and ready to learn.

The OEC is realigning the focus and work of the Early Childhood Cabinet, which is planned to reconvene this spring. After discussions with the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and early childhood stakeholders, we are framing the focus of the Cabinet in a two-generational approach. Two specific populations will be a priority: infants and toddlers and families with young children who are experiencing homelessness. Therefore, the establishment of an Infant and Toddler Services Board would create duplicative efforts. The OEC is very excited about this work with the Early Childhood Cabinet, and we encourage the Committee on Children to use the planning and findings of the existing Early Childhood Cabinet with this new focus. The Office of Early Childhood looks forward to working with the Committee on Children to ensure that Connecticut keeps a laser focus on the unique needs of our infants and toddlers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I would be happy to answer any questions that Committee members may have.