



ALL OUR KIN INC

A SAFE AND LOVING PLACE WHERE PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN LEARN

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**Testimony of Christina Nelson
Early Childhood Policy Fellow, All Our Kin
Regarding HB 6824
Before the Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015**

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and the esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. 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 in New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford and Norwalk and adjoining towns.

I'm here to submit testimony for HB No. 6824 and urge you to reinstate the funding for critical programs in the Office of Early Childhood's budget. At All Our Kin, we firmly believe that the Office of Early Childhood is the most effective mechanism for creating a statewide early childhood system that provides information and access for all of Connecticut's families, ensures quality in all child care settings, and ensures that young children are healthy, happy, safe, and prepared for success. The programs that are at risk in the Governor's budget are crucial for supporting children and families across our state.

I especially want to speak to the importance of the funding for Community Plans for Early Childhood Collaboratives. All Our Kin has been fortunate to work with the early childhood councils in New Haven, Bridgeport, Hamden, Stamford, and Norwalk, and we have seen their value firsthand. State funds allow local councils to ensure that more children can access early care and education in a variety of settings, to raise the quality of early care and education programs, and to engage parents on the topics of children's health and development.

A key component of any early childhood system is a strong commitment to engaging with communities. Early Childhood Collaboratives are crucial because of their ability to identify specific local resources, challenges, and strengths and use this knowledge to find solutions that work and advise state leaders. They know their communities – parents, children, service providers, resources – better than anyone. Furthermore, they are an important source of innovation in the field of early care and education. For example, All Our Kin's Toolkit Licensing Project, which gives family child care providers the training, mentoring, and support they need to become high-quality licensed providers and successful small business-owners, was developed and launched in collaboration with the New Haven Early Childhood Council. Since then, we have expanded the Toolkit program to Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk and adjoining towns, helping almost 350 providers, with the capacity to serve 2,100 children, get licensed by the state. All Our Kin's Family Child Care Network, which gives child care providers opportunities for professional development, mentorship, networking, and further education, also came into being because of the New Haven Early Childhood Council. These two programs –

Toolkit and the Family Child Care Network – have become models, both in the state and in the country, for how to effectively support family child care and improve quality.

The state dollars for Community Plans for Early Childhood Collaboratives also leverage significant philanthropic investment from the Graustein Memorial Fund through their Discovery Grants. Without this funding, local communities will struggle to serve our state's youngest, most vulnerable children effectively.

In closing, in addition to emphasizing the importance of the Community Plans for Early Childhood Collaboratives, we want to reiterate our strong support for the many valuable Office of Early Childhood programs at risk in this budget, including Help Me Grow, Parent Leadership Training Institute, and many more.

Now is the time to invest in our state's young children. We sincerely hope that the Committee considers the importance of the Office of Early Childhood's programs and reinstates funding.

Thank you for your consideration.