

Testimony of Carol Sargent
Childcare Learning Centers, Inc. – Stamford, CT
Before the Human Service Committee

SUPPORT

H.B. No. 7020 AN ACT CONCERNING Early Childhood Educators and Initiatives

March 19, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Committee.

My name is Carol Sargent and I am the School Readiness Director at the Childcare Learning Centers, Inc. (CLC), located in Stamford, CT. We are the third largest PreK program in the State, we have a teaching staff of 165 and they are members of UAW Local 376. I have worked at CLC which is a State Funded program for thirty three years. Against my father's wishes because he was burdened with my college debt, I began my work as a Head Teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood, receiving a modest salary of \$6,500.00.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 7020, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Educators and Initiatives. I am testifying today to request that you address the issue of low wages in early childhood programs immediately, rather than next year as the bill recommends.

As you will hear from my testimony, these teachers are highly committed, incredibly dedicated to our children and grossly underpaid.

It is the wages of these teachers and assistant teachers that I want to tell you about today. This issue is very important to me and should be to you since we are all entrusting these teachers with our most precious possessions - our young children and they do it full day full year for parents who need to work.

Although, we have made limited strides in increasing salaries, we are still paying our teachers very low wages.

- The Assistant Teacher salaries start at \$23,000.00 or \$12.08 per hour, a mere 27% above minimum wage.
- The Teacher position with an Associate's Degree that includes 30 credits in early childhood is currently starting at \$28,000.00 or \$14.80 per hour.
- Our starting salary for a Teacher with a Bachelor's degree is now making \$33,000.00 or \$17.08 per hour.
- We have tried very hard to increase salaries for Teachers with a Bachelor's Degree in order to recruit and retain them to meet the requirements of the State Funded Programs. However, these salaries are still not comparable to salaries offered to Public School teachers.
- All of these positions are 52 weeks per year and average 37.5 hours per week. The Assistant Teacher salary referenced above is equivalent to 26%-29% of the State Median Income. If this staff member was a single mother with three children she would be at 100% Poverty Level based on the 2014-15 Head Start Income Guidelines.
- These salaries can hardly compare with the Stamford Public School systems that are starting salaries at \$48,000.00 for a ten month period (\$57,000.00 if 12 months, which is 71% greater than a starting salary at CLC) for staff member with a Bachelor's degree. As well, the public school benefits and pension are far superior.

At the same time, we are confronting increased mandated requirements which we have been working very hard to satisfy by having 50% of our staff with an Associate's degree (AA) and 50% with a Bachelor's degree (BA) by July 2015. In addition, going forward we must retain the staff with BAs and be prepared to pay them higher wages. We will also need to budget for higher salaries for the 50% of the staff that are currently holding an AA degree that will need the BA degree by 2020.

I am also testifying on the important matter of recognizing a Bachelor Degree in early childhood education,

We are finding it difficult to hire staff members with a Bachelor's Degree from the current Office of Early Childhood (OEC) approved colleges. As stated, our program is in Stamford, CT. We attract a lot of candidates from Westchester County. We have also had candidates from Keene University, Bank Street College and a variety of others that are not on the approved list. We have been told by the staff members that are doing the actual work at Ct. Charters-A -Course that approvals from out of state colleges can take 3 – 6 months. Candidates are not going to wait that long to be approved and will be seeking employment elsewhere. There have been many discussions that teachers in the public schools need to pass the Praxis tests in CT. in order to get a job in the public school system. Once again, our staff is being asked to meet these requirements with no incentive attached. Their wages remain low and requirements get harder and harder to meet. These requirements are also hindering programs from being able to hire the qualified staff we are mandated to have in the classrooms.

I appreciate your attention to this issue and urge you to vote yes on House Bill 7020 which will raise wages to early childhood teachers and accept Bachelor's degrees from regionally accredited colleges so that we are able to hire qualified staff in our programs.

Thank You!