



Connecticut  
Early Childhood  
Alliance

**Testimony of Merrill Gay**  
**Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance**  
Before the Education Committee  
March 19, 2015

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Merrill Gay; I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I'm here today to speak in favor of H.B. 7020 and to suggest a few areas in which it could be strengthened.

Sec. 3 refers to the Public School information system. (C) (1) (A) describes data collected on students and includes a number of things including item (v) "*data collected, in any, from the preschool experience survey, described in section 5-515.*"

The problem is that 10-515 says,

Preschool experience survey. On or before March 1, 2015, the Commissioner of Early Childhood, in consultation with the Department of Education, shall develop a preschool experience survey that **may** be included in kindergarten registration materials provided by local and regional boards of education to parents or guardians of children enrolling in kindergarten pursuant to section 10-184. The board shall use such survey to collect information regarding (1) whether the child enrolling in kindergarten has participated in a preschool program, and (2) (A) if such child has participated in a preschool program, the nature, length and setting of such preschool program, or (B) if the child has not participated in a preschool program, the reasons why such child did not participate in a preschool program, including, but not limited to, financial difficulty, lack of transportation,

110 Bartholomew Avenue, Suite 4030, Hartford, CT 06106  
860.819.3647, [earlychildhoodalliance.com](http://earlychildhoodalliance.com)

parental choice regarding enrollment, limitations related to the hours of operation of available preschool programs and any other barriers to participation in a preschool program. A local or regional board of education shall not require any parent or guardian of such child to complete such survey as a condition of such child's enrollment in kindergarten.

The Alliance urges you to add language to change that "may" in the fourth line above to "shall." Otherwise there's no reason for school districts bother. This is particularly a concern because Section 5 of the OEC "Technical Bill" HB 1101 specifically removes from School Readiness council's responsibilities the task of estimating unmet need for preschool in their community. The preschool experience survey described in 10-515 is based on the surveys developed by the New Britain and New Haven School Readiness Councils. They were developed because there wasn't another way to easily collect the data needed to determine unmet need. Our fear is that if no one locally is looking at the data, and its optional, there is no reason for school districts to bother. It takes some effort to collect and enter the preschool experience data into a database. But if its not done, there is a great big missing piece in the puzzle of what needs to be done to reach universal access to preschool. Kindergarten registration is the best time to collect this data. Once you miss that opportunity it becomes much more difficult to get the information.

Section 5. Calls for the Office of Early Childhood to conduct a trend analysis of the data collected on non approved degree programs from the individual transcript review process. Undoubtedly you will hear testimony today urging you to dispense with the whole transcript review process and just allow the subsidized early education programs to hire teachers with the appropriate degree from any regionally accredited college. They will argue that the Early Childhood Teacher Credential is onerous, time consuming and adds such uncertainty that programs just won't hire people with out of state degrees. I will point out that at the Alliance's urging the OEC has recently released further guidance on its General Policy 15-04 the full text of which can be seen at

[http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/sr/gp\\_po/gp\\_15\\_04\\_additionalguidance.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/sr/gp_po/gp_15_04_additionalguidance.pdf)

This guidance makes it clear that a teacher hired with an out of state or unapproved degree will have a year to go through the transcript review process and remedy any deficiencies as long as they start the process within a month of the hiring.

Section 5's requirement that the OEC conduct a trend analysis of the individual transcript review process is very limited and intended to determine if there are other unapproved programs that ought to be approved because everyone coming through them gets approved through transcript review. The Alliance doesn't object to that but believes that what would be much more helpful for this committee would be a fuller analysis of progress

towards meeting the 2020 requirement of a Bachelor's degree in every classroom. We believe that such an analysis would have to take into account the following:

- The number of classrooms still needing a BA teacher,
- The progress of the incumbent workforce in attaining BA's
- The number of new BA's graduating from approved colleges
- The number of teachers in the individual transcript review process
- The rate of successful completion rate of the transcript review process.
- The retirement rate, and
- The number of people otherwise leaving the field

Section 6. The Early Childhood Alliance strongly supports leveling the playing field and requiring all state subsidized programs to become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Connecticut requires this of community based preschool programs being paid much less per child/hour through the school readiness program than Magnets and Charters receive per child/hour.

Section 7. The Alliance believes that local early childhood councils should be the building blocks of an early childhood system in Connecticut. Bringing together programs from five state agencies into the Office of Early Childhood was a huge first step, but if we stop there, we will have defragmented the state bureaucracy a little but we won't have solved the problems. The 36,000 children born in Connecticut each year grow up in families living in 169 towns. Those towns are as different as New Canaan and New Haven, Hartford and Harwinton or Sterling and Stamford. This is a tiny state with incredible local differences. For a family with a new baby trying to figure out the whole sleep deprived parenting thing is hard. With our very different local conditions it is a different hard in each place. In some places there are lots of services if you can afford them. In others, where virtually no one can afford them, the only services are ones that are subsidized and then in our rural communities there may not even be a pediatrician in town. Its not realistic to expect that even the most competent and best intentioned person working at the Office of Early Childhood can grasp the implications of all of those local differences. It is most definitely impossible to expect that the Office on its own can create the synergy that happens when people in a community come together to look at data and work together to solve problems. We believe that Local Early Childhood Councils (LECC's), which in many cases have incorporated the old school readiness councils into their broader mission have a critical role to play and should be funded through the OEC budget. The 41 LECC's in existence currently receive a little less than \$20,000 each through the Local Plans for Early Childhood line item in the OEC budget. Those funds are cut in the governor's budget. We urge that those funds be restored and that the line item be renamed Local Early Childhood Councils. Those state funds have been matched by the William Caspar Graustein

Memorial Fund and the Children's fund of CT. Additionally core funding from the state and Graustein has enabled the LECC's to leverage millions more in local and national grants.

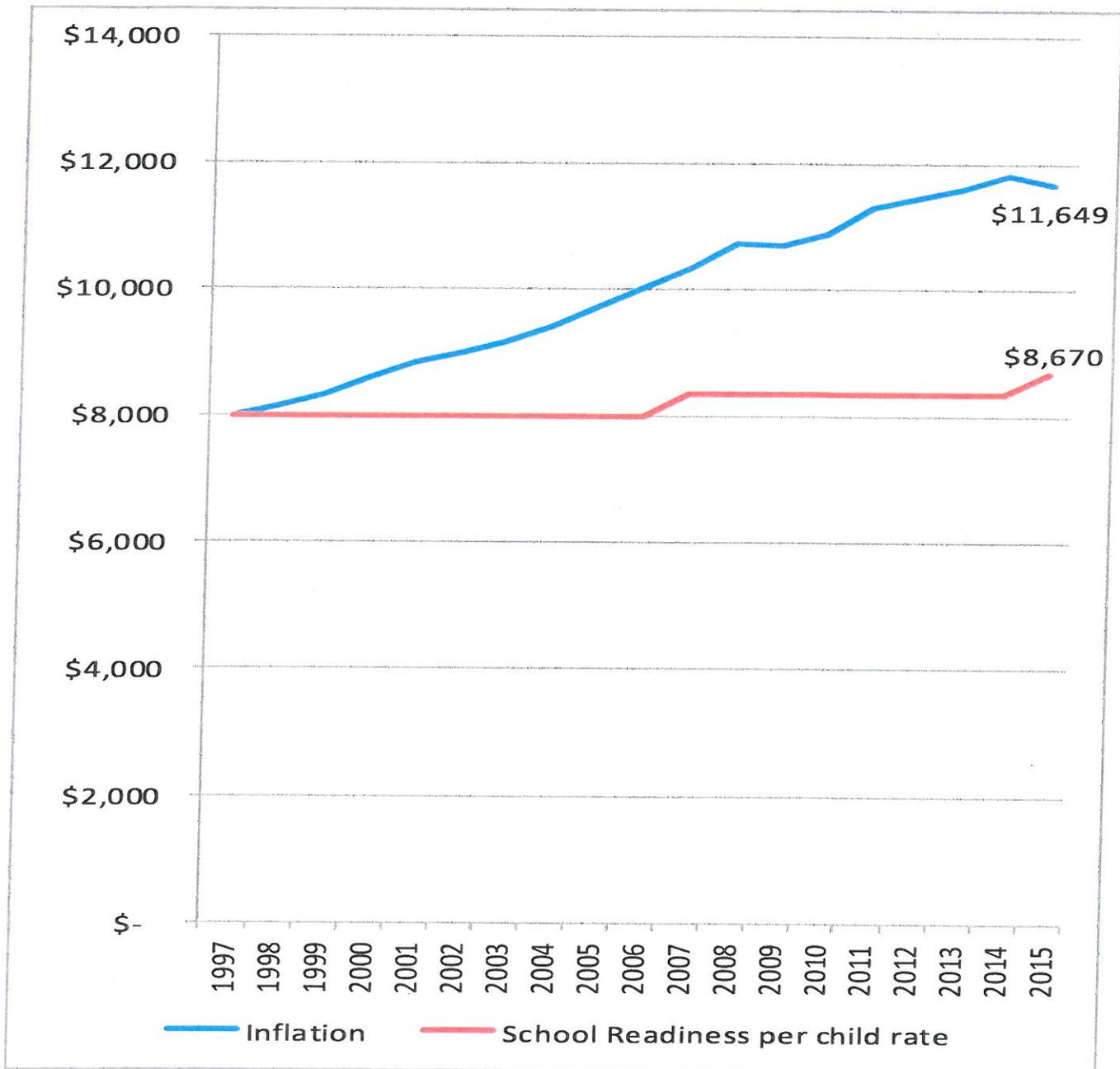
Section 8. This section requires the OEC to develop a plan to help early childhood programs meet the staff qualification requirements. This plan is to help existing staff earn Bachelor's degrees, raise wages and examine other strategies to retain staff. It is the Alliance's position that we don't need a plan, we need to raise wages. The reason wages are so low is explained by the attached graph.

Thank you for this opportunity and I am happy to answer questions.



Connecticut  
Early Childhood  
Alliance

# Connecticut Pays Preschools Only 74% Of What It Paid In 1997



**No Wonder Salaries Are So Low!**