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Testimony in opposition of SB: An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education

Good Afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote family economic success through both policy and program work.

We know that education is a path to opportunity. The money spent today on education and educational supports, affects the future wellbeing of Connecticut. There are some that believe publically funded education should only consist of direct instruction to children and youth. However, this is not an effective system of education. Children live in the context of family, school and community. It is the relationships that are cultivated through these foundational environments that generate adjusted, healthy and accomplished adults. While the Governor's budget keeps much of our core instructional programming in place, it underestimates the importance of family, community and early intervention in the lives of our children. The elimination of some of these core supports will compromise the growing system of early care and education and greatly impact the ability of many families and communities to provide what children need.

We are pleased that essential early care programs remain in place. School Readiness Programs, Care for Kids and Family Resource Centers will remain viable.

However, other important programs and supports did not fare as well and were completely eliminated. It is regrettable that many of the programs that empower **parents** to take an active role in their child's life are included in this category. Some of these programs include:

- Children's Trust Fund programs: Family School Connection and Family Empowerment
- Help Me Grow which provides an accessible screening tool that parents can use to track their young children's development. The results provide valuable information that can lead to early identification of developmental delays and subsequent early intervention. Early intervention has been proven cost effective. The elimination of this program could actually end up costing the state money.

- School age funding in the Childcare Services Program, providing extended hours for school age children.
- The Parent Trust Fund, which supports the nationally acclaimed Parent Leadership Training Institute
- Parent Universities

These family support programs provide avenues for parents to connect to children and to discover their role in the education of their children. These connections are important to our developing early care and education system and to our efforts to strengthen families. We respectfully suggest that these programs remain in statute.

The funding for the "Community Plans for Early Childhood" was also a casualty of this budget. This line item constitutes the state contribution to the public/ philanthropic partnership with the Graustein Memorial Foundation. Should the state money disappear, the matching funds would certainly follow.

To clarify, the word "plans" is misleading. This partnership funds far more than plans. It supports a statewide network of local collaboratives that work to promote the health and wellbeing of our youngest children.

Based on research and local community need, these collaboratives have designed and implemented strategies to address barriers to early learning success. Local community initiatives have promoted early literacy, reduced summer learning loss, addressed the causes of chronic absenteeism and provided needed information to decrease childhood obesity. All initiatives are data driven and have measurable outcomes. Often communities are able to use their collective partnerships to leverage other philanthropic funding.

These community collaboratives are a reminder that system building does not only happen horizontally through state agencies. For a system to be truly effective it must have vertical layers that reach down into community. Those that are at the community level can best glean what is needed, discover where gaps in services exist and then provide this information to the statewide agencies that have the capacity to provide needed supports and direction. We need system development at both the state and local level. The deletion of this partnership will have serious implications for both individual communities and our statewide system building strategies.

As Connecticut continues to build and grow a system of early care and education, it is important to be cognizant of what we have in place and what would be lost if it were to disappear. We need to value parents and communities as partners in this work. We need to value what we have done to date and we need to recognize what would be lost if it were to disappear.