

Testimony of Middletown Local Early Childhood Council

Middletown School Readiness/Discovery Council

Before the Human Services Committee

March 12, 2015

RE: SB 1044

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of Middletown's Local Early Childhood Council (LECC) we ask that you support **SB 1044**. Worthy living wages are the cornerstone to increasing the quality of our early childhood workforce. Investing in the early childhood workforce while promoting living wages in our state is a win-win policy agenda. School Readiness programs in CT have not seen a meaningful increase in the reimbursement rate to state funded programs since its inception in 1997. Wages were low then and they are low now. Yet we have increased the qualifications required, moving from a Child Development Associate to a BA degree.

This is an issue which is very important to our local council, which has been working for the last 18 years to improve teacher qualifications, skills, knowledge and the resulting programming and services for Middletown's children and families. Our LECC is comprised of many community stakeholders; Children's Library Director, School Superintendent, United Way, Opportunity Knocks, Middlesex Coalition for Children, Head Start/Early Head Start, Middlesex Hospital, ChildFirst, DCF, Middletown Public Schools, Parents, Physicians, Retired Preschool Teachers, all whom volunteer their time to be a part of the Council in pursuit of state/local policy to achieve better outcomes for young children.

The Office of Early Childhood is mandating as of July 1, 2015 that 50% of teachers hold a Bachelor's Degree and the other 50% hold an Associate's Degree. It is looking like CT will meet this goal; however, programs will NOT be able to compensate those who have increased their education to meet the degree requirements with higher wages unless there is a corresponding rate increase from public revenue. An average teacher hourly rate in Middletown is currently \$11.00 per hour and many have BA degrees. In fact, many of the teachers working at State Funded programs in Middletown are working multiple jobs just to pay their bills and to cover the costly tuition of the required degree program.

As dedicated individuals leave early care programs across CT in search of a living wage our safety net of public preschool will be compromised, thus leaving hundreds of families without access to the high quality care their children require to be successful learners in kindergarten. The research clearly indicates that teacher quality is the one sure variable in successful child outcomes. We must invest now!

Thank you.

Ed Bonilla, Co-Chair

Alice Torres, Co-Chair