



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Human Services Committee
March 12, 2015

Testimony in favor of *S.B. No. 1044 ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOUPMENT OF STATE COSTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LOW WAGE EMPLOYERS.***

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, 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.

This bill does two things. It tells big corporations with more than 500 employees in Connecticut that we don't appreciate it when they pay their employees so little that the rest of us have to pay for their health care, and their childcare through higher taxes. It tells corporations this in a language that they understand. It charges them a fee of one dollar for every hour they employ someone at less than \$15 per hour.

The second thing this bill does is to direct the state to spend that new revenue to bolster the services that low wage workers rely on. Now all too frequently in this building, when we think of bolstering services, we think about serving more families who need help. That's important, but I want to encourage you to think about the other aspect of bolstering services, paying the providers enough that they can do the job you expect of them. In the written testimony that has been submitted as well as from a few people who were able to make it here today, you will hear the stories of low wage workers who care for for young children.

Some of you may be wondering, Isn't this a bill about low wage employees of large for profit businesses? Why are these people who work for little non-profits taking up our time? They are testifying today because this is the only bill before the General Assembly that has any hope of addressing the crisis in the early childhood workforce. Despite our progress in serving more children through the School Readiness Preschool program, the subsidy amounts for early childhood education have been essentially frozen in time. Since 2007 there has been only one very small rate increase in the per child rate paid to school readiness and child

development center providers. For the Care4kids program there has been only one 3% increase in the 14 years since 2001, and state head start supplement has never increased since it was created decades ago.

As a result, the programs that provide early care and education services to low income families in Connecticut are hurting. They have had no choice but to balance their budgets on the backs of their employees. The result is that early care teachers are very badly paid and all of this is coming to a head because of the requirement that the state subsidized classrooms be taught by teachers with BA's. By July of this year 50% of the teachers must have BA's and by 2020, all of the teachers must have to have BA's. The problem of course is if you can only pay a low wage it is hard to attract and retain teachers who can earn much more elsewhere.

In closing, we urge you to pass SB 1044 and would encourage those of you who serve on Education and Appropriations to budget these new anticipated revenues to first increase the per child rates paid under the Care4Kids, School Readiness, Child Development Centers and the state Head Start Supplement programs then expand the programs to serve more children.

Thank you for listening and I would be happy to answer questions.