

Testimony Supporting S.B. 956: An Act Expanding the Care4Kids Program

Sarah Iverson and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.

Committee on Children

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and Distinguished Members of the Children's Committee,

I am a Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 956: An Act Expanding the Care4Kids Program. Care4Kids is a crucial support for Connecticut's children and working families. On average, the cost of child care in Connecticut is \$13,241 a year, or 43.4% of the income of the average single mother in Connecticut.¹ By subsidizing child care costs for low- to moderate-income families, Care4Kids allows many of these families to obtain safe and affordable child care for their children that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

In particular, we support:

- expanding Care4Kids eligibility to parents who are attending an institution of higher education;
- extending the redetermination period from eight to twelve months; and
- requiring information-sharing between the Office of Early Childhood and other pertinent government agencies.

In addition, we urge the legislature to ensure that there is sufficient funding to support any expansion of the program.

1. Extending Eligibility to Children Whose Parents are Attending an Institution of Higher Education

Allowing parents to attend institutions of higher education advances the ultimate goal of the Care4Kids program: economic self-sufficiency. Higher levels of education lead to higher earnings. An individual with a college degree earns, on average, more than 60% more over her lifetime than an individual with a high school diploma.² In Connecticut, the average hourly wage for a college graduate is \$30.80, compared to \$15.77 for a high school graduate and \$10.83 for an individual with no high school diploma.³ In addition to earning higher wages, individuals with college degrees are more likely than others to be offered employer-provided health insurance and benefit plans.⁴ Higher levels of education also expand the job opportunities available to individuals. Sixty percent of the twenty fastest growing occupations in Connecticut – including computer software engineers, network systems analysts, and physical therapists – require a minimum of a bachelor's or master's degree (and, notably, command salaries in excess of \$75,000 annually).⁵

When parents obtain advanced educational degrees, their children benefit. Care4Kids helps both parents and children, by allowing parents to work while their children are in high-quality, language-rich, nurturing, responsive environments that promote their cognitive, physical, and social-

emotional development. However, by expanding eligibility to parents attending institutions of higher education, Care4Kids can help parents and children in another way: improving the long-term prospects for both. Children of parents with higher levels of education enter kindergarten better prepared for school (recognizing their letters, being able to count to 20, writing their names), and are more likely to have positive health, educational, and employment outcomes.⁶ Cognitive skills of children between ages 3 and 5 have also been shown to be highly correlated with maternal education level.⁷

When parents obtain advanced educational degrees, society benefits too. College graduates are much less likely than individuals with lower levels of education to participate in public assistance programs or to be unemployed.⁸ The typical college graduate pays 78% more in taxes than the typical high school graduate.⁹ College graduates are also more likely to vote and to volunteer.¹⁰

Expanding Care4Kids to parents attending institutions of higher education transforms the program from mere work support into a true two-generation strategy, one that can raise families out of poverty and start children on the road to success in school and beyond. However, in order to ensure that Care4Kids can continue to serve this population, as well as the populations it currently serves (mainly low-income working parents and those receiving Temporary Family Assistance), the legislature must not simply expand eligibility but must also expand funding.

2. Extending the Redetermination Period from Eight to Twelve Months

By extending the redetermination period from eight to twelve months, S.B. 956 enables children to benefit from a higher degree of consistency in their care. Studies have documented that schedules and routines influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development, and that predictable and consistent schedules in preschool classrooms help children feel secure and comfortable.¹¹ Continuity of care is critical for development, particularly in very young children. **Children who experience fewer changes in child care providers during their earliest years demonstrate more outgoing and less aggressive behaviors in preschool and kindergarten.**¹² Sustained stable relationships with caregivers allow children to form positive, secure attachments, which build the healthy brain architecture that increases the odds of desirable outcomes later in life.¹³ The recently re-authorized Child Care and Development Block Grant recognizes the aforementioned advantages of consistency in care, and so requires the extension of the redetermination period from eight to twelve months.¹⁴

3. Require Inter-Agency Information Sharing

By connecting Care4Kids recipients with pertinent services, inter-agency information sharing promotes a "no wrong door" entry system for families to access a coordinated system of comprehensive care. Often, families who receive Care4Kids subsidies can benefit from services provided by other human services agencies, including the Department of Social Services, the Department of Developmental Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Public Health. The provision of S.B. 956 that requires information sharing across government agencies arose from the recommendations of the Two-Generation Policy Workgroup,¹⁵ which recognized the need for a simplified approach to eligibility determinations. Requiring inter-agency information sharing is a two-generation best

practice that will ensure that children and their parents receive the comprehensive support they need.

By expanding eligibility to parents pursuing higher education and requiring inter-agency information sharing, S.B. 956: An Act Expanding the Care4Kids Program promotes a two-generation approach to early care and education that will positively impact the long-term outcomes of children and their parents. Moreover, S.B. 956 implements federally-recognized best practices around redetermination, allowing children to benefit from a high degree of consistency in their care. These provisions will enable Connecticut to stay a national leader in early childhood systems building.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sarah Iverson
Policy Fellow
Connecticut Voices for Children
siverson@ctvoices.org
(203)498-4242 x 107

¹ Fraga, Lynette and McCready, Michelle, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care," (2014), available at <http://cca.worksmartsuite.com/UserEditFormFilling.aspx>.

² Baum, Sandy, Ma, Jennifer, and Payea, Kathleen, "Education Pays 2013," (2013), available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>.

³ Gibson, Wade and DeFiesta, Nick, "The State of Working Connecticut, 2014," (September 2014), available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ14workingct.pdf>.

⁴ Baum, Sandy, Ma, Jennifer, and Payea, Kathleen, "Education Pays 2013," (2013), available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>.

⁵ Connecticut Department of Labor, "Connecticut's Industries and Occupations: Forecast 2014," (Summer 2006), available at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/misc/forecast.htm>.

⁶ Baum, Sandy, Ma, Jennifer, and Payea, Kathleen, "Education Pays 2013," (2013), available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>.

⁷ Vandell, Deborah and Wolfe, Barbara, "Child Care Quality: Does it Matter and Does It Need to be Improved?" (2001), available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/execsum.htm>.

⁸ Baum, Sandy, Ma, Jennifer, and Payea, Kathleen, "Education Pays 2013," (2013), available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *See*, for example, Diane Dodge and Toni Bickart, "How Curriculum Frameworks Respond to Developmental Stages: Birth through Age 8," Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting. University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana, available at: <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/dodge.pdf>.

¹² *See*, Rachel Schumacher and Elizabeth Hoffmann, "Continuity of Care: Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care Research-Based Rationale," Center for Law and Social Policy, (August 2008), available at: <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/13791.pdf>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *See*, "Child Care and Development Block Grant §658e(c)(2)(n)(i)," (November 2014), available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/child_care_and_development_block_grant_markup.pdf. *See also*, National Women's Law Center, "Proposed Statutory and Regulatory Changes to CCDBG," (April 2014), available at http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ccdbg_comparison_chart_w_markup_april.pdf.

¹⁵ See, Zimmermann, Elaine, "A Two-Generational Approach: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive," p.26 (December 2014), available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/two-gen/2015-02-03_report_FINAL.pdf.