

Testimony Regarding HB5306

AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

I am testifying today to express concerns over HB 5306 and respectfully request that you keep the existing language in Section 6 - Section 17b-749e of the general statute regarding the structure of the Accreditation Facilitation Project.

The Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) has been in existence in our state for over fifteen years and is regarded nationally as a model program. It provides a myriad of supports for early childhood education programs (child care centers, nursery schools, Head Start programs, etc.) which are committed to continuous quality improvement through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation. These supports include monthly support meetings, monthly on-site individualized technical assistance, priority for state scholarships for staff to increase their educational qualifications, and a variety of tools to navigate the process. These supports are vital for programs that operate within a “system” that is woefully underfunded. The research is clear that **quality** early childhood education is a very important component to help children develop to their full potential, reach developmental milestones, and set them up for future school success. In addition, **quality** early childhood programs are an integral component that allows families to find and keep employment, become connected to essential community or state resources, and find support for their parenting issues. While licensing regulations are designed to ensure minimal standards of health and safety, NAEYC Accreditation demonstrates that a program is operating at a level significantly beyond licensing. In fact, the state of Connecticut holds NAEYC Accreditation in such regard that is required state funded programs to become NAEYC Accredited.

The existing AFP offers a number of strengths that should not be dismantled in any way. These strengths include:

- **A staff of Facilitators** who are knowledgeable about child development, early childhood programming, state regulations, early childhood leadership and administration, etc. -**AND** the

NAEYC Standards and Criteria (there are ten standards and over 400 criterion). They have dedicated themselves to becoming local experts on NAEYC Accreditation and ensure that they are up to date on best practices and the Accreditation process.

- **A program leader**, Deb Flis, who was integral in the development of our statewide system. Ms Flis not only has a vast amount of knowledge about quality improvement systems but also a personal relationship with leadership and staff at NAEYC. She is known nationally and was recently recognized as a “Master Leader” by Child Care Information Exchange (a national resource within our field).
- **A delivery system that is regional** and connected to local early childhood partners. The current AFP system is delivered through contracts with four regional education service centers (RESCS) and one community college. These regional connections are vital to recruiting new early childhood programs into the project. These regional connections are also key to knowing what resources are available to support local early childhood programs.
- **A program structure** that allows many different types of early childhood programs to become engaged. Our state has invested a significant amount of financial resources into School Readiness and CDC funded programs; however, it is imperative that we recognize ***that ALL children benefit from quality child care, and, therefore, ALL early childhood programs need access to supports that develop quality*** (not just School Readiness, CDC, Smart Start, and PDG programs).
- **A demonstrated track record** which has resulted in our state being ranked 3rd in the nation for the number of programs that have reached NAEYC Accreditation. At any given time, the AFP is typically working with approximately 100 programs statewide. It is a system that is cost effective.

I thank you for your work on behalf of the citizens of Connecticut and urge you to consider how important the current AFP system is to ensuring the positive outcomes for young children. Please keep the current language regarding the Accreditation Facilitation Project and ensure that a program with immense benefits for the early childhood community continues to exist in a meaningful and effective way. Please do not accept the proposed legislation change which could significantly reduce the scope and depth of work that is currently provided.