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Governor

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING



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TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE

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GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 10: AA Increasing Access to Childcare for Children Who Are Homeless

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Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Children's Committee. My name is Evonne Klein and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Housing (DOH). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before you regarding *Governor's Bill No. 10: An Act Increasing Access to Childcare for Children Who Are Homeless*.

Connecticut is a "Housing First" state. The Housing First model is an approach to ending homelessness that focuses on providing people with housing by removing as many barriers as possible – and then providing services as needed. What we know is that when individuals and families' housing needs are met, they will be on a more secure path to transforming their lives. Whether it is getting and keeping a job, getting or staying sober, or ensuring that their children go to school consistently, placing individuals and families in permanent housing as soon as possible is the key to success.

The proposal before you identifies two barriers to housing for families: (1.) the need for childcare so parents can take steps to get the family back into a home, including training or searching for employment and (2.) difficulty in obtaining medical documentation while homeless.

The bill before you would increase access to child care for children who are homeless by making them categorically eligible under the Care4Kids program, which will help families secure housing as well as obtain and maintain employment. This also ensures our children will have stable and safe environments to live, learn, and play.

Families experiencing homelessness may not have immediate access to the documentation they need to enroll their children in child care. By allowing for a 90 day grace period to provide this documentation, we're putting our children's needs first. This can be a huge burden lifted off the shoulders of those experiencing a housing crisis. The comfort of knowing your child has a stable and safe environment to go during the day allows parents the stability they need to search for a home, interview for

a job, or even just to go to their current job every day. By removing these barriers, a family can be lifted from poverty and go on to lead a stable, successful, and productive life.

I am proud to say that Connecticut is a national leader in preventing and ending homelessness as well as the production of affordable housing. Many of you probably know that we were the first state in the nation to end chronic veteran homelessness. We've set aggressive goals in our mission to make homelessness a thing of the past. We are working closely with the State Department of Education (SDE) to close the achievement gap and working with the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to address the issues of young children in shelters. We anticipate ending all chronic homelessness this year, and will then work towards ending all youth and family homelessness by 2020. We also have a Homeless Youth Service Coordinator in the Department. She works closely with other government agencies, as well as local advocates to devise the best strategies available to ensure our children have access to housing opportunities.

In 2014, there were an estimated 3,000-9,000 families with young children in Connecticut who were homeless according to the McKinney-Vento definition. That same year, 1,595 Connecticut families with young children lived in emergency shelters or transitional housing, according to the Connecticut Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Nearly one-third of all female homeless youth surveyed during Connecticut's first homeless youth count in 2015 were pregnant or parenting. Access to quality child care with the assistance of Care4Kids would have a significant impact in helping these families achieve housing and employment. This program will also provide children with a stable environment that improves developmental and health outcomes.

With all the work being done in Connecticut to prevent and end homelessness, it's important that we are not only leading the way with our efforts to achieve this goal, but that we are also leading the way with new and innovative strategies to assist our most vulnerable. I applaud Governor Malloy and the Office of Early Childhood for putting forth this legislation. The Department of Housing strongly supports this proposal and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have for me. Thank you.