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**Hearing of the Committee on Children
Tuesday, February 16th, 2016**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of S.B. 10 – An Act Increasing Access to Child Care for Children Who Are Homeless.

I am in a position to personally bear witness to the incredible hardship that lack of child-care can place on homeless families and how tremendously important this piece of legislation will be. I have been working for 4 years as youth clinical case manager in our transitional living program for homeless women in Hartford. We have 18 apartments that are filled with homeless women trying to change their lives. Our program comes with lots of rules and regulations in exchange for a chance to have safe housing and case management services for up to two years. Because of this structure, the program appeals to women with children. Typically, roughly 16 of our 18 apartments (more than 80%) are occupied by families. Some of the women who reside with us for two years truly are able to take advantage of the program, completing school, securing employment, or perhaps saving resources that will be needed to secure permanent housing.

However, there are also many women who leave without having made these gains. Their lives do not seem significantly different from the day they arrived. As I have tried to sort this out and find what differentiates these two groups, I have always come back to the same core issue: child care. I have continually observed that the women who are unable to truly change their lives are those who have preschool aged children and no access to childcare. Some women are fortunate enough that even if there is no access to outside daycare providers, they have family who can be of help. It is the women who have neither family nor funded support who truly struggle. They sometimes cannot even meet the minimum requirements to stay in our program. They often want to go to school or get a job but they are unable to find a safe place to leave their children.

I am so excited that this issue is being addressed. This legislation if passed will make a huge difference in these women's lives, and their children will benefit from the better jobs and housing that their mothers will be able to procure as a result.

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- S.B. 10 would change two early childhood policies to ensure children experiencing homelessness, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, have easier access to child care services. Streamlining access for these children to child care would benefit both the children and their parents, and assist the household in exiting homelessness to housing more quickly.
- We applaud the Governor for putting this legislation forward. S.B. 10 addresses important issues that now impede our efforts to stabilize the lives of homeless children and to help parents end the homelessness of their families.
- More than 1,000 families were homeless in Connecticut last year (2015), with more than 2,000 children as part of these families.
- Every year, some 90% of children experiencing homelessness in Connecticut are under 12, and nearly half of all children experiencing homelessness in our state are under the age of five.
- S.B. 10 would give the Commissioner of Early Childhood the authority to create a “protective services” category within the Care4Kids child care subsidy program. Care4Kids provides a child care subsidy payment to eligible households.
- The child care subsidy serves children birth to age 13. Under Care4Kids, families are eligible for the child care subsidy if they receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), participate in an approved education or training program, or are employed.
- Often, families experiencing homelessness lack employment, and the upheaval and unpredictability of homelessness makes it difficult for them to participate in worker training or secure new employment. This policy change to create a “protective services” category means children who are homeless would be “categorically eligible” for the child care subsidy regardless of the parent’s work status.
- S.B. 10 would also create a 90-day grace period for providing documentation of health and immunization records when enrolling in a child care center, group children care home, or family child care home. Licensing statutes require families to provide this documentation before a child can be enrolled. Often, families experiencing homeless do not have immediate access to these records. This policy change would ensure a child has immediate access to child care services in these settings.

- This legislation would benefit both children and parents experiencing homelessness.
- Children experiencing homelessness would have immediate access to safe and stable child care – which can be particularly helpful as a stabilizing influence in their young lives during an episode of homelessness, a necessarily stressful time.
- For parents, immediate access to childcare means that they can seek employment, participate in job training, search for new permanent housing and complete other necessary tasks to resolve their homelessness and stabilize their family lives.
- By helping the parents focus on these critical tasks, S.B. 10 will assist us in resolving each case of family homelessness more quickly. We know that this will benefit our public systems, like schools and emergency rooms, which are often taxed with additional demands when families remain homeless.
- Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important proposed legislation.