CONNECTICUT COALITION to
END HOMELESSNESS 257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 |P (860) 721-7876| F (860) 257-1148 | www.cceh.org

Testimony on S.B. 10, An Act Increasing Access To Childcare
For Children Who Are Homeless
Hearing of the Committee on Children
Tuesday, February 16th, 2016
By Lisa Tepper Bates, Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

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.

S.B. 10 proposed important two important changes that would ensure that children experiencing homelessness will have easier access to child care services. Streamlining access to child care for these children 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), more than 2,000 children were 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 state's Care4Kids child care subsidy program.

Under Care4Kids, families are eligible for the child care subsidy for children birth to age 13 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 "categorially eligible" for the child care subsidy regardless of the parent's work status.

I would like to share with you the story of one family that I worked with when I ran a family emergency shelter.

The mother in this family had moved her family, including her three small children, back to Norwich from out of state to take care of her own mother, who had a brain tumor. Unfortunately, the grandmother also fought addiction issues and mental illness, and her condition made it impossible for our client and her children to live at grandma's house.

Unable to stay with grandma and without adequate resources to secure housing, this family became homeless and came to my shelter. Our next step was to work with them to create a plan for them to secure new housing and stabilize their lives in Connecticut.

The mother had a very strong work history, and wanted very much to return to work – which she needed to do to support her family. The obvious problem was that she could not afford childcare on her own, and she had two small children (under three) with her all the time.

Without childcare, she was unable to go to the library to use the computers and search for jobs.

Without childcare, she could not travel locally to visit local businesses advertising "help wanted" and inquire about jobs.

Without childcare, she could not attend job interviews and put her best foot forward to secure employment.

In this case, my shelter appealed to local donors, and scraped together enough funding to provide temporary help for this mother to secure short-term private childcare that allowed her to look for, and ultimately secure, a job. That type of private funding is in great demand and hard to come by – needed for basic shelter operations like heating oil, staffing and food – seldom available for needs like childcare for one client.

The changes proposed in S.B. 10 would have allowed this mother – and parents like her – immediate access to the childcare that is critical to enabling them to focus on job search, attend interviews, or participate in the job training they need so that they can secure employment. Employment – and the income that comes with it – is the cornerstone required to stabilize the lives of these families, and to ensure that they can exit homelessness and remain housed.

A change in legislature would have a positive impact on a family like this, and 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.

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.

By allowing parents focus on critical tasks like securing employment, S.B. 10 will assist us in resolving each case of family homelessness more quickly. Homelessness exacts a toll not only on the families who experience it and the emergency shelters where they stay – we know that family homelessness creates other costs. Children experiencing homelessness often require more medical treatment and more special services in schools. We know that ending family homelessness more quickly will benefit our public systems, like schools and emergency rooms, which are often taxed with these additional demands when families remain homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important proposed legislation. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Lisa Tepper Bates
Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness