

Testimony Regarding the Governor's Budget Proposal & the Office of Early Childhood
Christina Nelson, Early Childhood Policy Fellow, All Our Kin,
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016

Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Christina Nelson, and I am a Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. We are a nationally-recognized, Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains and supports family child care providers. Our work has been shown to increase the supply of high quality child care in low-income communities throughout Connecticut and have positive impacts on the lives of child care providers, working parents, and young children.

I'm here today to testify regarding Governor Malloy's budget proposal, and to urge the Committee to consider the proposal's impact on direct services for young children, particularly Care 4 Kids, our state's child care subsidy system. We are very concerned about the short-term and long-term impacts of the potential cuts to the Office of Early Childhood's budget. Far from preserving and enhancing direct services to Connecticut's working families, the proposed budget contains \$4 million in direct cuts to Office of Early Childhood programs, and underfunds the state's Birth to Three system (which assists infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities) by approximately \$8 million. Birth to Three services are guaranteed to any young child who meets eligibility criteria for the program. Accordingly, the \$8 million in missing funds may be cut from other key direct services in the Office of Early Childhood, including Care 4 Kids. We thus strongly support increased appropriations for the Birth to Three program.

Care 4 Kids is a lifeline for Connecticut's working families, for whom the high cost of child care would otherwise represent an insurmountable barrier. At All Our Kin, we see firsthand how these subsidies allow children of low- and moderate-income parents to benefit from stable child care arrangements that are key for their healthy academic, emotional, and mental development.

The Governor's budget proposal maintains funding for Care 4 Kids. However, this year, Care 4 Kids is on track to cost more than it has in the past because of new federal regulations that 1.) allow more families to qualify for child care subsidies and 2.) extend eligibility periods for qualifying families. These new regulations are important strides for our national system of early care and education, as they recognize the importance of continuous, uninterrupted and reliable care for young children with working parents, but the governor's proposed budget does not allocate the additional funds necessary to implement these regulations and maintain care for all children eligible for the program. We anticipate that this will result in a reduction of child care slots and a rejection of new applicants to the program, even if they meet eligibility criteria.

If Care 4 Kids is cut even further due to the under-budgeting of the Birth to Three program, many, many parents will be unable to get to work because they don't have access to care for their young children, and the state will see an increase in family poverty. The cuts will also have a rip-

ple effect through the community of child care providers who will no longer be paid for providing the early care and education experiences that young children need and deserve.

In the short term, the underfunding of Care 4 Kids will be harmful for parents, providers, and the state economy; in the long term, by denying children the opportunity to access safe, reliable child care settings, it will prevent children from reaching their full potential as students, workers, and citizens of our state. We thus support increased funding for Care 4 Kids in order to maintain care for all eligible children.

Decades of research have shown that investing in children during their earliest and most vulnerable years has immense positive outcomes for the state and its residents. We respectfully urge the committee to ensure that the Office of Early Childhood has the funding it needs to effectively administer its direct service programs to the young children who desperately need them.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.