

Testimony Opposing Reduced Appropriations for the Office of Early Childhood
House Bill 5044: An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending
June 30, 2017

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Appropriations Committee
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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Sarah Iverson and I am an Associate Policy Fellow testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children applauds the Governor's budget proposal to maintain funding for School Readiness, the state's largest subsidized preschool program, and Care4Kids, the state's largest child care subsidy program. We also support the Governor's proposal to hold harmless funding for state-funded centers. The maintenance of funding for School Readiness, Care 4 Kids, and state-funded centers are important indicators of our state's continued commitment to its youngest citizens.

However, we ask the legislature to reverse the proposed funding cuts and elimination of programs that recognize the need for a high-quality, two generation approach to early education. We express concern that the Governor's budget proposal does not demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that all early care and education (ECE) settings are of the highest quality and can address the comprehensive needs of children and their families. **In addition, ongoing budget challenges in the Office of Early Childhood make it difficult for providers to plan and for children to receive services.**

In particular, we provide the following feedback about the proposal's impact on early care and education:

- **We oppose the Governor's proposal to cut programs targeted at improving the quality of our state's early care and education network by 5.75 percent, totaling \$3.6 million.** Programs subject to reduction include Community Plans for Early Childhood, Child Care Quality Enhancements, School Readiness Quality Enhancements, Head Start Services, and the Children's Trust Fund, among others.¹ Studies show that the multiple long-term benefits reaped by early care and education are only realized if programs are of high-quality.² These programs have already been subject to cuts over the past few years, and an additional reduction will make it even more difficult for Connecticut's children to be served in high-quality programs.³ Without access to high-quality programs, our youngest learners will not reap the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional benefits that last well beyond the earliest years.
- **We support increased appropriation for the Birth to Three⁴ program.** Without increased funding for Birth to Three, which offers home-based developmental services for our youngest children, other programs in the Office of Early Childhood may be subject to additional reductions to cover Birth to Three expenditures. Due to under-budgeting of Birth

to Three in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, and anticipated growth in utilization of services in FY 2017, without additional funding the Office of Early Childhood may be forced to reduce spending on programs.

- **Flat funding Care 4 Kids may not be sufficient to maintain care for all children eligible for the program.** While the Governor proposes to maintain funding for Care 4 Kids, new federal regulations⁵ would require an expanded Care 4 Kids eligibility period and increased regulations for providers, reducing the amount of money available to support child care slots. For example, under the proposed regulations, families who earn above 50 percent State Median Income will now be kept on the program for up to a year, an important phasing out period that minimizes disruption in children’s lives despite fluctuations in parent income. However, without increased funds to support such increased eligibility periods, new applicants may be denied access to this crucial subsidy program.
- **We oppose the elimination of programs that promote a two-generation, comprehensive approach to early care and education.** The Governor proposes to eliminate Even Start (\$451,250), Improving Early Literacy (\$142,500), and Wraparound Services (\$25,000). These programs take into account the fact that children do well when families do well, and help implement crucial educational supports to increase opportunity for low-income parents of young children.
- **We oppose the consolidation of early childhood programs into one “Agency Operations” line item.** As we stated in our recent report on the impact of the budget on children and families, “This decision reduces transparency and accountability in the budget by masking the impact on individual line items. Under this change, an agency head could cut a program entirely without any legislative oversight, a worrisome precedent to set. While it may make sense to evaluate whether particular programs and services as currently configured are meeting the needs of state residents, without knowing how that assessment will take place, lawmakers and the public are shut-out of the process.” As a result, we oppose the proposed consolidation of programs and services under Agency Operating Funds.⁶

While we understand the need for fiscal responsibility, we believe that it is critical to make investments in children and working families, and that such investments yield incredible rewards for the state in the long run in terms of healthier, more successful children, improved academic outcomes, increased economic growth, and a better prepared future workforce. We therefore respectfully request that you preserve funding for the aforementioned programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Feel free to contact us with any questions or if you require additional information.

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¹ The Children’s Trust Fund is made up of the components Help Me Grow, Family School Connection, Family Empowerment Programs, and the Nurturing Families Network

² Espinosa, Linda M., “High-Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What it Looks Like,” National Institute for Early Education Research (November 2002), available at <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/1.pdf>

³ See Iverson, Sarah et al., “Impact on Early Care and Education of the Final Budget for Fiscal Year 16 and 17” (July 2015), available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/ece15finalbudgetanalysis.pdf>.

⁴ The portion of Birth to Three that funds infants and toddlers not eligible for Medicaid was transferred to the Office of Early Childhood from the Department of Developmental Services in Fiscal Year 16. The portion of Birth to Three that funds Medicaid was transferred to the Department of Social Services. This change is to “reflect a change in the rate structure (bundled rates to fee for service) and the transition of birth to three providers from performing providers who deliver Medicaid reimbursable services to providers who directly bill Medicaid.”

⁵ See Office of Early Childhood, “Child Care Development Fund Reauthorization” (January 2016), available at <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?a=4547&q=574712>.

⁶ Defiesta, N. et al., *Impact of the Governor’s Proposed Budget FY 2017 on Children and Families*, (February 2016), Retrieved from <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/bud16govbudgetanalysisfy17.pdf>.