



Testimony on HB 5044

AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE BUDGET

Appropriations Committee February 16, 2016

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

In this tough budget year, we are happy that the Governor recognizes childcare and early education as core state functions and does not propose cuts to the School Readiness, Child Development Centers or Care4Kids line items that are proposed to merge into an Early Care and Education line in the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance has long called for the state to begin braiding and blending the various funding streams into one adequate per child payment, rather than the current system in which each provider tries piece things together on their own. However, this is something that should be done with some real planning. There are substantial changes mandated by the re-authorization of the federal Child Care Development Block Grant, the ongoing problem of trying to meet the B.A. teacher requirements in a low wage industry, and issues of unmet need in some towns and underutilized slots in other places that all need to be sorted out before we merge everything into one line item.

That said, the rest of the proposed OEC budget includes a couple of very troubling things. It eliminates the Even Start program. Even Start is one of the original two generation programs that combines quality infant toddler care, adult education for mothers who need to earn their high school diploma, GED or learn English, and parenting education. One out of every eight babies born in Connecticut has a mother who didn't finish high school. Even Start has been proven



effective though independent evaluation. This is the model that we ought to be expanding to adult education programs across the state, not eliminating.

The second troubling thing is the whole idea of block granting funds into an Agency Operations line rather than the current system of legislatively approved line items. In the interests of transparency and legislative oversight we urge you to reject block granting. The impact of merging together the line items and giving the commissioners the discretion to make cuts will mean that you give up your power of the purse string. Things like Help Me Grow, a nationally recognized model to support children with developmental delays, and funding for local early childhood councils (Community Plans for Early Childhood) could be eliminated administratively. The probability of this is increased by the fact that the two largest line items proposed to be merged into the new Agency Operations line are Early Intervention (Birth to 3) which is an entitlement program that can't be cut and may in fact have cost overruns, and the Children's Trust Fund, 90% of which matches federal home visiting grants that can not be cut without the loss of federal funds. This means that it is the remaining smaller line items that will bare the brunt of cuts.

In closing, none of us envy your job of closing a \$570 million deficit. It is a daunting task. We urge you to not to give away your power but rather to do your best to protect programs that serve the young and vulnerable in our state.