



**Testimony of Karen Brennan**  
**Director, Stamford Early Childhood Collaborative/United Way of Western CT**  
**Submitted to the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 16, 2016**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Karen Brennan and I am writing as the Director of the Stamford Early Childhood Collaborative, one of the Discovery initiatives in place around the state. The Stamford Early Childhood Collaborative is a community partnership of over 50 organizations committed to improving the quality of life for all Stamford children. As stewards of early childhood, we connect resources, highlight best practices, and provide parents of young children with the information they need to navigate the resources available to them for their young children.

I am writing today to oppose the “block grant” approach to the budget proposed by Governor Malloy. We are concerned that without requiring State agencies to set and publicize their budget decisions the legislature will be stripped of its decision making abilities which will negatively impact the budget process. Combining all programs into one Office of Early Childhood budget erases transparency and will leave organizations and leadership in the dark as to how to proceed to serve children.

Local early childhood collaboratives like ours provide the local infrastructure for early childhood in Stamford. In 2015, the \$660,000 in the Community Plans for Early Childhood line item supported more than 40 local early childhood councils with an average grant of about \$20,000 which the councils were able to match with millions in philanthropic and local funds to run programs to improve early childhood in our communities.

In my community, the Stamford Early Childhood Collaborative received just under \$19,000 from this line item which was leveraged and matched resulting in more than \$20,000 in support from the United Way of Western Connecticut and other funders to support the work of our local collaborative.

The Stamford Early Childhood Collaborative used the funding for Community Plans for Early Childhood funds to support the infrastructure of our organization which coordinates all of the programs we run. We cannot run the programs in our community—programs like early childhood teacher training, parent outreach, kindergarten school readiness, etc.—without this infrastructure in place.

The programs and services that we are able to bring to our community include:

- **School Readiness Council** – serves more than 6,000 children across our community;
- **Early Childhood Fair** – a free annual event that provides families with information and resources on preschool and daycare options as well as direct connections to social service and health information; for the past several years, over 450 people attend;
- **Child Care and Preschool Provider’s Network** – brings best practices and high quality professional development to a diverse group of public and private providers;
- **Help Me Grow Collaborative** – a collaborative of health care providers, family resource centers, the City’s library, diaper banks, parent centers and others that teaches parents of the youngest and most vulnerable children to screen and track their own child’s development, resulting in the early identification of potential developmental delays.;
- **Kick Off to Kindergarten Initiative** – a series of programs for preschool providers, parents, and children designed to improve kindergarten registration, to collect baseline data on incoming kindergartners, and to prepare children for their first day of school; and
- **Stamford Cradle to Career Framework** – the Collaborative is transitioning to become the first Community Action Network in Stamford’s Cradle to Career initiative which is focused on collective impact—a single minded, resolute effort on the part of all community stakeholders to focus resources on a common agenda—closing the student achievement gap and improving educational outcomes for ALL children.

The loss of the State’s support will likely result in the loss of matching program funds that are contributed through private donations and foundations. The total loss of all of these dollars will halt our capacity to mobilize parents, bolster community-based organizations, child care providers, health professionals, local businesses, city government, and the Stamford Public Schools to develop community-informed strategies and to empower partner organizations in their implementation of these strategies. And it will jeopardize our capacity to work in unison with the State’s Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education. It is therefore critical that the line-item for Community Plans for Early Childhood be maintained and continued in order to support the work of local collaboratives like ours.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue.