

Testimony of South Farms Nursery School, Middletown

Kelly Veneziano, Owner

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee

My name is Kelly Veneziano and I am the owner of a small early childhood program in the Middletown Community. My program has been funded with SR dollars since 1998. Currently we serve 18 children all of which access school readiness slots. At this time approximately 45% of the families we serve are at or below 50% of the state median income, and many who are over are the "ALICE" families of Connecticut. In order to pay teachers an adequate salary which for a BA degree we feel is roughly \$25 per hour, we would need to collect approximately \$16,000 per year per child; but in reality we are only collecting an average of \$12,000 per year and that fluctuates each year depending upon the parent fee contribution, and Care4Kids.

I ask on behalf of my center, students, staff, and families that you oppose the 12 million dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood, as well as the block grant approach being proposed by the Governor as it removes transparency from the State budget, and leaves business's such as mine in the dark as to how to proceed in serving our children and families. Currently we work on shoe string budgets, meeting unfunded State licensing mandates, NAEYC mandates and School Readiness mandates. My teachers are working at or below the poverty level, many of whom hold the required credentials and others with degree's that are accompanied by large college loans, and many still require state assistance to survive.

In addition, I ask that you please protect the Quality Enhancement funding that is given to the Middletown community. These funds provide 10 free trainings per year which helps teachers' community wide obtain the mandated 20 hours of professional development (again an unfunded mandate-child care licensing, School Readiness and NAEYC) required of them. These funds also help to provide onsite coaching for staff and the program at large surrounding the mandates, learning experience plans, and general early childhood best practices. These services are invaluable and we can't duplicate them on our already underfunded budget.

We as a center are proud of what we are able to provide to the children and families we serve, please do not take that away from us!!! Please do not put me in a position where I am forced to alter operation times; layoff teachers and or support staff, and worst of all leave families without quality child care for their children, which in turn will leave them with no other choice but to lose their job.

In today's trying economic status I ask that you please re-think the suggested cuts to OEC as we are trying to encourage and bestow the importance of an education and assist our parents/families in becoming part of our country's workforce.

Sincerely,
Kelly Veneziano
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