

Testimony of Windham Early Childhood Programs

Aliki Caraganis, Supervisor of Early Childhood Education, Windham Public Schools

Before the Education Committee,

February 23, 2016

RE: Bill 5306 An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood

Representative Fleischman, Senator Slossberg and members of the Committee,

My name is Aliki Caraganis, and I am the administrator of Windham Early Childhood Center in Willimantic. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Windham Early Childhood Center. The Windham Early Childhood Center kindly requests you reject the language change in bill 5306, related to the regional accreditation projects (AFP) in Section 6 (see below):

Sec. 6. Section 17b-749e of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2016*):

The Office of Early Childhood shall, **[establish and fund five regional accreditation projects, within available appropriations. The office shall select qualified applicants for each region through a request for proposal process. The office shall give priority to child day care facilities where at least twenty per cent of the children live with families earning less than seventy-five per cent of the state median income level]** within available appropriations, support programs providing child care services to achieve accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The office shall set priorities for receipt of support under this section.

The Accreditation Facilitator Project (AFP) has been in existence since 1998 and is based regionally throughout Connecticut. The AFP helps support programs who wish to go through the NAEYC accreditation process, an accreditation that is mandated for all State funded early care and education programs. The AFP offers free support services on site for programs, as well as localized workshops which pertain to the NAEYC accreditation process.

Last year, our Early Head Start Program went through the NAEYC reaccreditation process and the AFP support was critical from the preparation through to the completion of the process. The loss of these supports for many programs will be detrimental to them maintaining NAEYC accreditation. In some cases, it would also be costly since they may have to hire outside contractors to provide onsite supports and workshops.

Connecticut ranks 3rd in the nation for the number of NAEYC accredited programs, and through the AFP has built a strong and trusting relationship with NAEYC which has allowed programs to keep their NAEYC staffing report updated through the Connecticut Charts A Course Teacher Registry; an agreement made based upon the work of current staff. A change in funding and supports may jeopardize this long standing relationship Connecticut AFP has built with NAEYC.

Over 90% of the NAEYC accredited programs in Connecticut have been supported by the AFP. Many programs funded since 1998 have used the AFP for not only initial accreditation supports, but also re-accreditation supports on multiple occasions. The AFP is open to all licensed child care centers wishing to obtain NAEYC accreditation, not just State funded programs. These free supports help programs improve the quality of care being offered to families and children throughout CT.

The current AFP system is well poised to provide quality improvement assistance to early childhood settings at ALL levels of quality: therefore, it could be expanded upon to deliver the wide array of services that have been outlined in the most current CCDF plan.

Connecticut's draft CCDF plan contains the following statement: "The QIS will provide cohort based supports including monthly meetings and individualized on-site assistance to licensed center-based providers; and free training and technical assistance to achieve performance of NAEYC's 10 Program Standards to all settings." These activities are in alignment with the current AFP; this bill proposes to eliminate the current AFP system.

Our program has the following questions:

- What plans are in place for the project to have extensive NAEYC Accreditation knowledge and expertise both in those directly delivering the AFP services and in the leadership of the project?
- What plans are in place for the project to have a regional approach (which helps to ensure relationship building, understanding of community needs/resources, utilization of local spaces, etc)?
- What plans are in place to develop meaningful and effective relationships with NAEYC?
- If there is no Spring selection of new AFP sites, what will happen to programs who need to enter the AFP project now in order to meet their upcoming NAEYC Renewal deadline?
- Will there still be a statewide cap on the number of active AFP sites? How will that cap be altered to reflect the reduction of funding? Will there be any 'priority' groups (i.e. Initials vs Renewals? Funded programs? etc) to be responsive to the reduced level of service?

We thank you for your time and consideration. Since 1998, the AFP supports have been invaluable to Connecticut's Early Care and Educations programs, and the loss of the support will be detrimental.

Thank you for your consideration,

Aliki Caraganis
Supervisor of Early Childhood Education
Windham Public Schools