

Kim Nagy-Maruschock
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RE: Raised H.B. No. 5307 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE UNREASONABLE DELAY OF ENROLLING A CHILD IN KINDERGARTEN.

To limit the circumstances in which a parent may withhold enrolling their child in kindergarten until the child is seven years old

Testimony concerning Raised H.B. No. 5307:

I write to you today with my concerns regarding Raised H.B. 5307 and the repeal of CT General Statute 10-184. As an educator in the field of early childhood special education for over 16 years, I have worked with a wide variety of students with varying disabilities. After receiving the benefit of early intervention services through a Pre-K special education program, many students enter Kindergarten ready to learn and participate in that environment with the benefit of moderate special education support. However, sometimes this isn't this case. For some students who have made modest gains while receiving explicit, intensive academic intervention and related service therapies, they continue to demonstrate skills more than one year below their same-aged peers. In these cases, another year of Pre-K early intervention services has made a world of difference for these students. The "gift of time" can provide these students with the time to grow physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively, decreasing the "gap".

The excerpt below provides the message currently being given to those parents who wish to provide their child with this important extra time to develop (Taken from the NOTICE OF PARENT RIGHTS AND INFORMATION RELATED TO SPECIAL EDUCATION provided to LEAs this past fall): "If your child is of kindergarten age, you have the right under Section 10-184 of the Connecticut General Statutes not to enroll your child in kindergarten. Specifically, Section 10-184 of the Connecticut General Statutes states: "The parent or person having control of a child five years of age shall have the option of not sending the child to school until the child is six years of age and the parent or person having control of a child six years of age shall have the option of not sending the child to school until the child is seven years of age. The parent or person shall exercise such option by personally appearing at the school district office and signing an option form. The school district shall provide the parent or person with information on the educational opportunities available in the school system." Preschool-age children with an individualized education program (IEP) are already enrolled in the public school and are receiving a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Therefore, five and/or six year old children with an IEP whose parents exercise their option of not enrolling their child in kindergarten at their public school, will not be eligible to continue to receive special education and related services because the child is no longer enrolled in a public school."

Please think about the implications of the final sentence in the current recommendation being provided to parents of *very young children with disabilities*. This means that a student who has been receiving early intervention services through the public school system since the age of three will discontinue those services for an entire school year, and enter into Kindergarten without the benefit of those services for the entire year! How, in this age of "accountability" and striving to "close the achievement gap" does this seem like best practice to anyone? This gap year will only increase the disparity between these young learners and their same-age peers.

These students will appear on the first day of Kindergarten demonstrating delays which could have been lessened with the benefit of early intervention. Instead, important instructional time will have been lost, and these students will then have to go through the initial referral process all over again.

I understand that this proposed bill would repeal the current General Statute 10-184. In this proposed bill, it states that children who are 5 years old MUST attend Kindergarten, taking away the parental choice of withholding their child until age 6 or 7. It also states that the exception to this is if "(1) a physician certifies that the child should not attend school until age seven, or (2) the child has been identified as having a developmental delay, as defined in section 10-76a." However, this bill does not clearly outline what this means for the student. Would the student remain a "Pre-K" student, which under the current statute is not allowed? The bill should include a statement that the LEA would be required to continue providing services to this child in an appropriate Pre-K setting.

I am very concerned that this bill unfairly limits who can retain their child in Pre-K and it does not look out for the best interests of these young students. For example, when looking at young children without an identified disability, there are certainly those children with "ber" birthdays (September, October, November and December) who may not be developmentally ready for the rigorous (and inappropriate) expectations of a Kindergarten classroom. Therefore, if this bill is going to be considered, it should be revised to change the start date age for Kindergarten to August 1st. This still won't provide the parental choice to those students "age-eligible" for Kindergarten but not yet socially/emotionally ready for a variety of (undiagnosed) reasons.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to reconsider the intent of this bill, and instead look at what is best practice for young children, with and without disabilities. Parents should continue to have the right to retain their child from Kindergarten as they deem appropriate, and students with IEPs should have the right to remain in Pre-K for another year prior to Kindergarten, rather than being disenrolled from the early intervention services which are so critical to their progress.

Lastly, regardless of whether or not this bill moves forward, the members of the Education Committee need to take a hard look at the current implications in Statute 10-184 and what a disservice it is providing to one of the most vulnerable group of young learners.

Sincerely,

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Pre-K Special Education Teacher