

Education Committee
February 24, 2016
Testimony Regarding H.B. 5306 and S.B. 176

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischman, and members of the Education Committee

My name is Edie Reichard and I am the director of Sleeping Giant Day Care (a Child Daycare Center - CDC). The CDCs were established by state statute in 1968 to provide high quality affordable early care and education for birth to school aged children of low and moderate income working parents. Statewide, CDCs serve approximately 4000 children each year. We have been a part of the program since 1979.

H.B. 5306 An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood

Section 1. Expands eligibility for Care4Kids the child care subsidy to families with income up to 85% of the state medium income. Currently it is capped at 50% and may open up to families with incomes up to 75% of the state medium income. The expansion aligns with new federal regulations related to the Child Care Development Block Grant. I support the expansion but would caution that with no new dollars this will be very difficult to sustain.

Section 6. Eliminates the requirement that the OEC establish five regional Child Care Accreditation Programs (Accreditation Facilitation Projects). I am concerned that the elimination of these AFPs will leave the field without a statewide infrastructure. The AFPs have a proven track record and are the main reason many of our programs with mandates to be NAEYC accredited are able to do so. The AFPs have been in existence since 1998 and are regionally based throughout Connecticut. They are the ones who stay current with any changes at the national level for NAEYC and they hold workshops to dispurse this information to our centers and to those who are seeking accreditation who are not publicly funded. NAEYC accreditation is mandated for all state funded early care and education programs. The loss of the AFPs will be detrimental to those of us trying to maintain NAEYC accreditation. Due to the AFP's support, Connecticut has become number 3 in the nation for programs with NAEYC accreditation. They are the reason programs such as mine have a strong and trusting relationship with NAEYC. They are also the reason we have Connecticut Charts A Course - the early care and education teacher registry. The registry allows us to keep close tabs on all of the upper level schooling our staff is attending. Until I and other directors know what is replacing this program, we ask that no action be taken at this time to eliminate the current program.

S.B. 176 An Act Concerning the Smart Start Program

The bill would raise the eligibility criteria for Smart Start, a new preschool program in the public schools, from 50% of state medium income level to 60%. Although I applaud the goal to expand preschool, I believe the expansion will be at the expense of lower income children and recommend delaying expansion until the budget crisis is resolved. I believe we need to set priorities and target scarce resources to the most at risk children. In addition, I urge the legislature to fund current child care services, such as mine and other CDCs, adequately in order for us to recruit and retain the child care teachers we need to keep our funding.

The vision behind establishing the Office of Early Childhood was to create one system of early care and education. We are a long way from that goal. Each program, state funded centers

(CDCs), Smart Start, and School Readiness all have different requirements for income eligibility and different reimbursement rates. I urge the legislature to focus on current programs and bring all programs up to the same reimbursement rate and focus on the most vulnerable population of working families. The funding for expansion is just not there.

Thank you for your consideration of my remarks.

Edie Reichard