Education Committee

February 24, 2016

Testimony Submitted by Kathy Queen, State Funded Child Development Centers Director's Forum

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischman and Members of the Committee, my name is Kathy Queen and I am here to testify regarding several bills before you today on behalf of the State Funded Child Development Center's Director's Forum. The Centers established by state statute, provide high quality early care and education each year to over 4000 birth to school age children of low and moderate working parents daily since 1968.

H.B. 5306 AAC Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood:

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

Section 6. Eliminates the requirement that OEC establish five regional Child Care Accreditation Programs. We are concerned that the elimination of this Accreditation program that has a proven track record of success will leave the field without a statewide infrastructure. Until we know what is replacing it we ask that no action be taken at this time to eliminate the current AFP program.

SB 176 AAC 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 the state medium poverty level to 60%. Although we applaud the goal of expanding preschool, we believe the expansion will be at the expense of lower income children and recommend delaying expansion until the budget crisis is resolved. We need to set priorities and target scarce resources to the most at risk children. In addition, the Forum urges the legislature to fund current child care services adequately in order to recruit and retain the child care teachers.

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, Smart Start, and School Readiness all have different requirements for income eligibility and different reimbursement rates. We 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 the opportunity to testify this morning and we are available to answer any questions at this time.