

**To: The Honorable Edwin Gomes, Chair  
The Honorable Peter Tercyak, Chair  
The Honorable Catherine Olsten, Vice Chair  
The Honorable Victor Cuevas, Vice Chair  
The Honorable Tony Hwang, Ranking Member  
The Honorable David Rutigliano, Ranking Member  
Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee**

**From: Darlene C. Ragozzine**

**Date: March 13, 2013**

**Re: RB 5370 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE**

My name is Darlene Ragozzine and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you this evening in support of RB 5370. I am a retired Professor of Early Childhood Education from the CT Community College system, where I taught for 13 years and then directed the state's professional development system, CT Charters-A-Course for another 20. I have since retired and now provide consultant services, specializing in professional development systems and wages of the early childhood field. Most importantly, I am an advocate for the child care workforce, the children they teach and their families.

I would like to congratulate the committee for introducing a bill that will provide an increase to the minimum wage in our state incrementally to \$15.00 an hour by 2022. I cannot stress how important this is for those in a field that has been sorely underpaid, mainly the child care workforce. These workers for decades have been supporting Connecticut families with their own foregone wages, while families work and try to better themselves financially to live in this great state. Indeed, it is high time that we reexamine the issue of compensation for the low wages workers both nationally and in this state. Child care workers care and educate our most vulnerable and youngest children from these low-wage earners, of whom many are themselves. We know from a *MIT Living Wage Calculation for Connecticut (2015)*, that a family consisting of "1 Adult and 1 Child" must make \$28.53 an hour, just to meet a household survival budget in this state.

In a recent report from the *National Survey of Early Care and Education(2015)*, a study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it was reported that the median hourly wage of center –based teachers is \$9.60 (minimum wage) with a high school diploma , \$11.00 with an associate’s degree and \$13.90 with a bachelor’s degree or higher. In addition, the wages for those working with children under age 3, compared with those who work with children ages 3-5, are far lower, on average \$4.00 less with a bachelors’ degree. This would seem counterintuitive knowing what we do about the neuroscience of brain development and the foundation formed during the child’s first years.

Since there continues to be a call by both the state and federal government for increased bachelor degree credential requirements for this workforce; the pay to attract and retain these workers must coincide and exist with the educational attainment level. The hourly rate of for a person with a BA working in an early learning setting falls far short below the average of people with a BA of \$27 per hour. This is derived in part because programs cannot afford higher salaries without additional revenue to pay these teachers; therefore credentials go unrewarded in terms of salary increases. It is high time that this is changed. These programs are often dependent upon parent fees and as we all know parents struggle with the costs of child care. The recent *Alice Update (2016)*<sup>1</sup> reported that child care is **28%** of monthly expenses, which represents the highest percentage of monthly costs. So the confluence of paying a **higher salary or minimum wage, not raising parent fees and finding a source of revenue to support the increase employees’ wages, is the “trilemma” that has been plaguing this field for more than a decade.**

Clearly, it is high time that we address this in part by raising the minimum wage. We can no longer afford to experience the unintended consequences of a poorly compensated early childhood workforce; actually we cannot afford the cost, given the state subsidies that many of these teachers are on due to not make a living wage to survive in this state. The early childhood workforce is critical to achieving a strong Connecticut economy by allowing parents

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<sup>1</sup> ALIOCE update (Asses Limited Income Constrained Employed) How Child Care Costs Impact Many Connecticut Families. Connecticut United Way

to work while their children are cared for in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment by highly trained professionals, who are making a living wage.

If I can respectfully make one recommendation to the bill, it would be to find a solution to waiting until 2022, to enact the \$15.00 minimal wage without burdening programs our publically funded programs and also the small “mom and pops “ or increasing parent fees to support the wage increase. The nation is on high alert as to the benefits that a child will gain when attending a high quality early childhood program starting at birth and through age 5. Individuals employed within the ECE sector are paid far less than comparably educated colleagues. Data from *Connecticut’s Early Care and Education Workforce Report(2011)*<sup>2</sup> showed that child care workers were paid annually less than janitors, locker room attendants and pet attendants just to name a few.

I know that there is bipartisan support in our legislature for the importance of early childhood education and to ensure that ALL Connecticut’s children have access to it. We all understand that this will help close the achievement gap and make children ready to learn by kindergarten Connecticut can be a leader in the country with the passage of this bill. It takes and innovative approach, which will begin to remedy an issue that can no longer be ignored. For the sake of our youngest children and their families, we cannot afford the cost of inadequate compensation for their caregivers and teachers or other low income paid workers.

I urge the committee to move this bill forward. Thank you again for this opportunity.

Respectively Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darlene Ragozzine", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Darlene C.Ragozzine

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<sup>2</sup> Report prepared by CT Charts-A-Course Early Childhood Registry with The Office of Workforce Development

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