

Testimony of Merrill Gay on SB912

Senators Slossberg & Boucher, Representatives Fleischman & Lavielle, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I would like to begin by saying that the Early Childhood Alliance strongly supports the idea of highly qualified teachers working with our youngest learners in state subsidized early childhood programs. That said we have to acknowledge the elephant in room that is keeping us from reaching that goal. That elephant is low pay for early childhood teachers.

Senate bill 912 addresses the difficulty that early childhood programs have in meeting the requirement that there be a Bachelor's level teacher in all subsidized early childhood classrooms by 2020. There are 1,679 of those classrooms. Currently, 61% meet the 2020 requirement. However, the real news is that only 15% of those staff reaching the BA level, have done so under the new system. The rest were grandfathered in. Under the new system, there are only two ways to earn a Bachelor's level Early Childhood Teaching Credential:

- Graduate with a BA from one of only 5 Connecticut colleges approved by OEC, or
- Go through a rigorous individual review process if you have a BA from any where else.

The creation of the Early Childhood Teachers Credential and its system of approving college early childhood programs was created with the best of intentions. However, when coupled with the elephant in the room, we have a real problem. With low wages awaiting them, students are not beating down the doors to enroll in the early childhood programs at those five colleges. Even if we bring on a couple more colleges that are in the OEC pipeline to be approved, we will not have enough graduates to meet the need.

We are very happy that you have recognized this problem. However, we have some concerns about SB912. This bill essentially takes the standard used to grandfather in existing staff when we created the new BA requirement and applies it to new staff. It says that a criminal justice degree with a couple of early childhood classes is the same as a major in early childhood. That will drastically devalue the early childhood degree and weaken the effort to put really well trained teachers in front of some of our most at risk students.

This bill goes too far rolling back the clock to the time when our goal was simply to say that we have a BA level teacher in every classroom (regardless of whether that BA is in art history or mortuary sciences) as long as they have 12 credits in early childhood. The current teachers with Associates degrees in early childhood have more training in early childhood than the BA teachers that this bill proposes to permit.

As an alternative, the Alliance supports allowing programs to hire as teachers anyone with a BA in Early Childhood Education, Child Study, Child Development or Human Growth and Development from any college in the United States accredited by its regional accrediting body. This would take the OEC out of the business of approving accredited colleges that offer the named degrees. We believe that OEC should retain an individual review process to allow someone with a BA in something else to prove through work experience and a portfolio review or additional course work, that they have the competencies to qualify them as a lead teacher. I thank you for this opportunity to testify and would be happy to answer questions.

