

Middlesex Coalition for Children

Testimony on SB 912, HB 7035, and HB 7155

March 1, 2017

Chairs and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Izzi Greenberg. I live in Middletown and am the director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children, an economic and racial justice organization that works to improve outcomes for children and families in Middletown and Middlesex County.

I am going to comment on a few separate bills. First, my thoughts on **SB 912 AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**. To start, I appreciate your recognition of the problem that there are not enough qualified early childhood teachers in our state to meet the staffing requirements that centers are held to. There are a few problems here. Right now, only 61% of classrooms have staff that meet the 2020 BA requirement, and of those staff, 85% were grandfathered in and only 15% have met the requirements by graduating from one of the 5 approved CT colleges or going through the individual route to certification. We don't have enough educational institutions training our workforce.

To ease the problem, I support allowing BA's in Early Childhood, child study, child development, or human growth and development from **any college in the country that is accredited by their regional accrediting body**. I am concerned that the language in this bill would roll things back to a BA in anything with 12 credits in early childhood. The solution to this problem is not to weaken the quality of our system, it's to expand the opportunity for education.

Second, I'd like to comment on **H.B. No. 7035 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING EDUCATION**.

Connecticut's early care and education system is facing a crisis. Childcare is unaffordable, increasingly unavailable, and the closing of the Care 4 Kids program this past summer has only added to the problem. Since August, over 2500 families have joined a waiting list. Supports for vulnerable families are overextended and the Governor's budget exacerbates the problem. **The proposed budget keeps Care4kids closed for the next 2 years.** It cuts \$7.4 million from Care4kids in FY18 and an additional \$2.6 million the following year. This would keep Care4Kids closed to all but current TANF families for the next two years. The impact of these cuts will be that as children age out, Care4Kids will largely cease to pay for early childhood services and become in practice, a school age program. This will have serious implications for the economic viability of many early care programs, threatening care for full-pay children who receive no subsidy.

The budget cuts \$7.7 million from the Early Care & Education line item in FY18. That translates to approximately **1,100 children who won't get infant/ toddler, preschool or after school care next year.**

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The budget **block grants** vital multiple programs, including Family Resource Centers, and shrinks their budget, creating infighting for a smaller pie. It **eliminates** Community Plans for Early Childhood, Improving Early Literacy, EvenStart, Healthy Start, and Help Me Grow. It **cuts** Head Start, the Child Care Quality Enhancement funds, and moves Birth to 3 to the Department of Social Services, creating new problems for an already overextended program. **Dismantling, or otherwise weakening the Office of Early Childhood will not lead to improvements in quality, ease of use, or amount of care available, and those are the ultimate goals for our system and our children.**

Each of these changes whittle away at the strong early care system that Connecticut has been working so hard to create.

We started the year with a \$33 million deficit in the Care 4 Kids program. I know the budget is bad, but **the alternative to fixing the hole in the Care 4 Kids budget is worse**: families out of work, children in unsafe care, and more families using expensive entitlements because they *can't* work. This will impact our state's employers of skilled low-wage workers, whose workforce is harder to replace when they become unavailable. And, if centers aren't receiving the income they need to stay afloat, there won't be care for the subsidized *or* full pay families. It just won't exist.

I know how difficult this is to hear, but **the real, lasting solution is giving the Care 4 Kids system, and indeed the entire system of early care and education, the money it needs to run quality programs that are available for families in Connecticut.** This saves our school districts money in special education funds, it saves the state money in entitlements, and it helps our state to function properly.

We have an untenable achievement gap in Connecticut, and this gap starts early. We cannot give an inch when it comes to quality or quantity in our early care system. We need an appropriately funded early care and education system and we cannot compromise on quality. I urge you to oppose the move of Birth to 3 to DSS, oppose the cut to Care4Kids and urge that it be funded at \$155 million in order to reopen the program to families up to 50% of state median income. I also urge you to oppose the lumping together of all of the student support programs (including Family Resource Centers) into a single line item with a 50% cut.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that **H.B. No. 7155 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TO DEVELOP A PROPOSED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR COMPENSATION SCHEDULE** is a good idea. Early care and education workers are some of the lowest paid educators in our state. We expect them to be teachers, caregivers and social workers all in one, and for that we pay barely above minimum wage. We want to increase quality and bring dignity to the field, yet we can't offer pay commensurate with qualifications. We need the Office of Early Childhood to develop a compensation schedule and begin the conversation about low wages in early childhood.

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